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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[WORLDLY WISDOM.]

CECIL'S FORTUNE.

CHAPTER III.

RESCUED.

Love at first sight,
So pure, so deep;
From that sad night
It poisoned sleep,
And drove his peace away.

THERE was a dense and dirty crowd of rough men and noisy, slatternly women gathered about the doors of the "Empress." Half-an-hour since frantic and furious cries of fire had resounded on all sides of the theatre, and that portion of the multitude who are always ready to make holiday out of any crisis or misfortune or catastrophe, had responded to these cries, joined in them, and hastened to the spot in the full expectation of beholding bodies stiff and blackened, bearing scarce a semblance to humanity, picked out of devouring flames, and of hearing screams of anguish and terror.

Besides all this, these people, very many of them, lived by robbery, and thus they came crowding round the theatre doors in hopes of plunder and pillage. They were disappointed. The firemen had been able to reach the spot in time to save the building and everyone within it from the flames, notwithstanding many had been trampled on and seriously hurt in attempting to leave the theatre.

Cecil Renfrew stood against the wall supporting in his arms the senseless girl for whom he had conceived such a sudden and devouring love.

He did not know how to find her carriage. He might call for it, but he dreaded the terrible-looking people who crowded about him.

Lady Kate wore a large fur-lined mantle, so that her gleaming jewels were hidden, but still as it was many greedy eyes were already fixed upon her and upon her protector. There was not a policeman just then in sight.

"Please to make way," said Cecil, civilly, to a very villainous-looking man who stood close to him.

He was a swarthy man, something like an Italian Jew; he was dressed in the sorriest rags. As the light fell upon him from the street lamp, it revealed a face wicked and sinister, cruel and cunning; it was the face of a brigand. Cecil was a deep and subtle reader of faces. He read this man's like an open book. He shuddered, and his arm tightened round Lady Kate. The man's eyes were fixed upon her. Then he looked boldly at Cecil.

"She is not your wife?" he said, speaking in a foreign accent, and reaching out his dirty hand towards the young girl.

As if by instinct she at that moment recovered consciousness, opened her eyes, lifted her head, and uttered a startled cry.

"Where am I? What has happened? Who is this?"

She stood upright as she spoke, half turned and looked up into the handsome face of Cecil Renfrew.

"Do not alarm yourself," he answered, in gentle tones. "It is the theatre. We were afraid of fire, and I brought you out, but there is nobody hurt; the flames are extinguished. I will call your carriage, but there is such a crowd. Lean on me."

"Pardon me" (it was the foreign ruffian who spoke; he brought his evil face close to Lady Kate's). "I will just knock down this young man," said the villain, "and see you to your carriage!"

Cecil doubled his fist; his dark brows met in a scowl.

"Out of the way!" he said.

Instinctively the ruffian shrank back, but it was only for an instant. He had at his heels a crowd of his friends. He waved his arms and called out:

"Down on the swells. Let us, then, see what belongs to them!"

"And not a policeman in the crowd," said Cecil to himself.

Nevertheless he shouted at the pitch of his voice: "Police, police! the Earl of Belgrave's carriage!"

And then it struck him that most likely the said carriage was not near the theatre at all, for a ballet was to have followed on the play of "Greed," and so most likely the carriage would not in the ordinary course have arrived for another half hour. He shouted again "Police!" and then a crowd of ruffians gathered round him. With wonderful spirit Lady Kate disengaged herself from his arm.

"You can defend us both, sir," she said, calmly, "if you are not hampered by being obliged to support me."

Cecil's powerful fists drove desperate blows to right and left of him, and many among the cowardly, thievish crowd shrank back in a sort of horror, howling forth against those whom in their fury they called "swells" with an ugly adjective before the word, but the swarthy ruffian was supported by three creatures as ugly,

as desperate, as cruel as himself—a couple of brutal-looking men, and a savage woman. This last personage clutched the Lady Kate by the shoulders and dragged her a few paces along the pavement.

"We'll have some of your finery," she hissed into the ear of the earl's daughter. "Whoever you are, you shan't go back to your swell friends quite as you came here. We'll make you pay us something!"

Lady Kate was no coward, but she was only eighteen, a young, slight creature, and the virago who clutched her shoulders was a very powerfully built woman about six-and-thirty years old. Kate threw out her white arms and laid hold of the woman's shoulders.

"Release me!" she said, in a calm, commanding voice.

But unhappily just then the lamp-light fell full on a rich bracelet of massive gold, clasped by a glowing precious purple amethyst. The glittering hauberk attracted the attention of the woman; her evil eyes gleamed.

"This is splendid," she said. "Give me that bracelet quick, and I will let you escape, otherwise—" and the clutch on the shoulder of the young lady tightened.

"No, that was my father's gift to me on my birthday," said Kate; "but money you shall have if you will wait at fourteen, Grosvenor Square to-morrow at four o'clock, that is if you help me to find my carriage."

"If? Not likely. A nice trap you would prepare for me?" cried the woman, snuffing—"a policeman to meet me on the steps. No, thank you, I will have that now, or I will break your arm and spoil your milk-and-water face. My name is Wild Cat amongst my friends; let me tell you that."

"Help!" cried Lady Kate, at the pitch of her voice, and as she spoke she saw the head of Cecil, her tall protector, towering above the crowd.

Another moment and he had thrust the woman aside, and drawn the arm of Lady Kate through his own. Lady Kate had not seen his encounter with the swarthy savage and the two other ruffians. She did not know how he had dealt blows right and left with almost the power of a sledge hammer; she had not seen the two ruffians fall back blinded and stunned by Cecil's fists; she did not know how much scientific skill there was to guide mere brute force; she had not seen the foreigner stand aside to wipe the blood from his face laid open by Cecil's knuckles. Not that Cecil Renfrew had escaped unhurt, as the sequel showed.

"Come, we will find your carriage," said Cecil. "I heard a cry in the crowd; I believe it is now out there beyond the kerbstone."

"Yes, yes!" cried Lady Kate. "I recognise our livery and horses. Oh, what a crowd! How are we to reach it? Would anyone suppose that there were such a number of dirty, ill-looking people in London?"

Cecil had no time to answer the Lady Kate's simple question; he only smiled and hastened with her towards the carriage and through the crowd which now opened to allow them to pass. A change had come over that multitude. Many of them were afraid of Cecil's fists, and besides, a file of policemen were visible crossing the widest portion of the street, and thus it happened that Lady Kate, leaning on Cecil's arm, reached her carriage in safety, entered, assisted by the footman, and sank amid the silken cushions with a certain graceful, half-childish air of being "at home" in that pompous and most luxurious nest that somehow made Cecil sigh as he felt instinctively the depth of the social gulph which separated him from this daughter of an earl. All at once she started up and addressed the coachman.

"Parker, the countess is in the theatre. We must go in and bring her out."

"I will go."

Cecil spoke slowly, almost bluntly. Lady Kate, who was sensitive and very kind-hearted, fancied that she had hurt the feelings of this

"odd, rather nice stranger," for thus she called him in her girlish heart.

"You will go? How kind you are," she said, gently. "I can't thank you enough. You saved my life from those dreadful people. Well, if you will go I shall be grateful to you as long as I live."

Cecil bowed low in silence, and then moved away among the crowd. The Lady Kate looked after him and sighed.

"He must be a gentleman," she said. "What a superb yet reverential bow he makes, and what a sad, proud, clever face—not handsome, perhaps, but better than handsome—ah, a thousand times better than handsome. How I wish he would turn out to be an university man—one of the Cambridge eight, a first wrestler, a poet whose poems make the stones weep, an officer who has won medals for courage in battle. What should I like him to be? Alas! if he were even all that I have said, my mother will despise him and snub him if he does not prove to be the heir to a great landed estate and a fine-sounding title. Ah, I wish that The Waldron was not mortgaged, and that I had a brother to inherit the estate. Fancy being obliged to marry a very rich man, and all the rich men are so uninteresting. I have the very greatest mind never to marry at all."

Was the lovely Kate falling in love with the odd stranger?

Lady Kate had never in all her life before sat in a carriage in the Strand waiting for anyone. This was a portion of the great city of which she knew nothing. She supposed it devoted to theatres. Not at all the place in which a lady should be found on foot. And here she was waiting, watching the jostling rough crowd and the twinkling lamps, and wondering when her mother would arrive. At last she heard her voice.

"Ah, there she is. Thanks, thanks! my servants will assist me. I am extremely obliged to you."

Lady Kate started up in the carriage.

"Mother," she said, "that gentleman,"—yes, Kate really brought the word out at which the countess stood aghast—"has saved my life from some dreadful people in the crowd. He must call; the earl would like him to call. Oh, yes, sir," turning to Cecil with a sweet impetuosity, "the earl would like you to call at number fourteen, Grosvenor Square, and he will thank you, sir, I am sure, and anything that he can do for you he will do, and—"

"Be silent!" the countess said in low, emphatic, angry tones to Lady Kate.

Nobody heard the command save the beautiful girl herself. The next moment the countess was seated, and she turned a handsome, coldly polite, though apparently condescending face towards Cecil Renfrew.

"We cannot thank you sufficiently," she said. "Call at number fourteen to-morrow at about half-past one in the day and ask to see the earl, and if there is anything that he can do, I am sure he will be charmed."

Cecil raised his hat high off his head as the carriage drove away, and Lady Kate said to herself that it was the most nobly formed head she had ever seen.

"What a terrible thing," said the countess, with a shudder, when she was alone with her daughter.

"And if it had not been for that stranger?" said Lady Kate. She paused a moment and then said: "Mamma, I feel convinced he is a gentleman."

"It cannot possibly matter to us what he is," said the countess, with a short cold laugh. The Lady Kate felt snubbed.

"I don't see what right we have to think ourselves above all the stars of Heaven in magnificence," said the young beauty, impetuously.

"My good child, you must have a tiasne after your fright—something to soothe your

nerves and make you sleep; you are excited. Doctor Wyld must prescribe for you."

"My nerves are quite strong, thank you, mother."

Lady Kate spoke as haughtily as the countess herself. For some strange subtle reason she felt considerably irritated. All the old traditions of her race; all the schoolroom lessons in conventional; all the axioms she had learnt having "noblesse oblige" as their end and aim, seemed suddenly as the veriest rubbish in her eyes; but why? in the names of common sense, family pride, and dutifulness to her parents.

"I suppose that I am a little mad to-night," Kate said to herself, afterwards, "for I keep thinking of that terrible woman, and then the memory of the stranger comes to me, and I feel as if—as if I had met the magician of whom the poet talks; he whose silence is silver, and whose words are golden, and whose face is as the face of a demigod. Oh, yes, I am decidedly excitable and out of my wits to-night."

When the carriage stopped at the great house in Grosvenor Square, the Lady Kate said to the countess:

"Mother, I will have a soothing tiasne, if you please; I feel as if I could not sleep at all."

The house of the Earl of Belgrave in Grosvenor Square was wide and grand and spacious. The pictures, the plate, the carved oak furniture, the Chippendale cabinets and chairs were the admiration of Belgrave, but though the plate was antique, the old china worth a small fortune, the library one of which any English noble might be proud, the carpets and hangings and upholstery generally were all of that dim and faded kind which speak of a past generation, and of a horror of new expenses and new debts.

Lady Kate followed the countess into the hall, a spacious room that reminded one more of the entrance hall of some ancestral country seat than of a modern town mansion. The walls were lined with family portraits, many of them from the hands of the greatest masters of the great art of portraiture—Joshua Reynolds, Gainsborough, Lely, and Lawrence; the antique chairs were upholstered in fine needle work more than a century old.

A huge fire of logs burned in the low grate. There was a square of faded Turkey carpet in the centre of the dark polished floor. Lady Kate and the countess walked straight to the fireplace and sat down on each side of it shivering and complaining of the cold as fine ladies will in common with others who are not fine ladies, or even ladies at all.

"Send Gregory to me," said the countess to the footman. "Tell her to bring me my slippers and a cup of chocolate here."

Lady Kate felt for some reason as if she could not endure the presence of her lady mother that night. She started out of the deep antique chair in which she had been seated, and she called out:

"I wish to go to my room. Good-night, my dear mother. I hope you will sleep well after the chocolate and all the attentions of Gregory, who understands you so well."

As Lady Kate spoke she kissed her mother's brow lightly.

"Kate, it is so ill-bred, such demonstration. When will you acquire that repose and polish of manner without which a lovely, high-born, and otherwise accomplished woman remains still like some species of gawky schoolgirl—all excitability, and what common persons term 'gushing.' The word, by the way, is expressive, though odious, and I must say that it exactly describes your manners at times. I assure you that when I see you give way to boydenish spirits, and sometimes to a pettishness that touches on violence, I am pained because I know what the old Duc de Montalbert is, and what his son must be. I also know that the duchess is famed for her lofty calm and perfect repose of manner; she will be critical, I warn you."

Lady Kate turned and faced her mother. She and the countess were alone in the wide old hall, for the servants had gone to hasten the

chocolate and Miss Gregory, her ladyship's maid.

"I daresay I shall hate her," she said, softly, "and the old due and the son also."

"I hope you come of too noble a stock, Lady Kate Ormond, both on your father's side and on mine, to be capable of any strong passion such as 'hatred.' We ought not to admit such a word into our vocabulary, and you will oblige me by not using it again. How very long Gregory is with that chocolate. I am absolutely sinking for need of nourishment after the terror and fatigue I have undergone."

"Dearest mother, your calm repose of manner and dignity of bearing will support you under this trying ordeal of Gregory's lingering, dawdling ways."

"You are impertinent, mademoiselle," said the countess, and her fine eyes flashed.

Lady Kate winced. Whenever her mother was especially angry with her she called her invariably "mademoiselle." The cold displeasure of the Countess of Belgrave was more cutting than a winter's blast. Still, it was quite true beautiful, clever, impulsive Kate had been very impertinent to her lady mother; her conscience told her so, and Kate's was a sensitive conscience.

"My dear mother," she said, "forgive me? I am irritable, tired, a little hungry, very sleepy, and all at once the programme of a long life spent in outward calm repose, when the inward human heart may be raging, struck me as something dreadful and appalling; but I must learn wisdom from the world of which I am a portion, and in which I shall, of course, have to play my part as the Duchesse de Montalbert, unless—unless the Marquis de St. Germain thinks me too vulgar, or too rude, or too ugly."

"It is impossible, I can assure you, mademoiselle, to say that he will not think you one of those; you are always rude; you are sometimes vulgar, daughter as you are of a hundred earls. As for ugly, it is true that you are at present reckoned a beauty. Your beauty is worth its price in the matrimonial market, but a hundred things may happen to spoil that beauty before the marquis comes here in the autumn to woo you as his bride. It is therefore quite uncertain whether he will be willing to ratify the compact into which your father and his have entered."

"Let us hope—" began Lady Kate, demurely.

Then she broke into a little laugh.

"Well, mother, good-night, good-night. And here comes Gregory with your chocolate—ah, and an omelette."

Lady Kate went out of the hall at a side door and began to mount the staircase. It was wide and grand, formed of pure white stone, with a richly carved balustrade on one side and picture panelled walls on the other. There was a richly flowered though somewhat faded carpet running up the centre of this staircase. Lamps lighted it; lamps placed here and there in niches in the walls, held in the hands of bronze female figures exquisitely moulded.

Lady Kate Ormond was anything but a common-place or conventional individual by nature or temperament, whatever she might become in due time under the guardianship and training of her countess mother. She went up the stairs and she said to herself:

"What a pretty piece of architecture is this staircase, and what a flowery pathway this carpet makes for me mounting, climbing ascending to my own room, where I have a warm fire, a luxurious bed, a maid to brush my hair. I wonder what kind of stairs some of those ragged girls in the crowd have to mount to reach their sleeping rooms, and what kind of rooms they are, and if among the ragged men of their acquaintance there are any whom they love, and who love them in the fashion that poets speak of—love strong as death. But that is all the phantasy of schoolboys, my mother says, and that there is no such thing in all this wide, weary, merry, mercenary world, not that she calls this world by those hard names, for she is a daughter of fashion and of this world, and is

in her generation wiser than the children of light. Heigho, I wonder if it really is a wicked thing under certain circumstances not to love one's mother very much? Well, I suppose it is."

CHAPTER IV.

MISS POMFRET.

*I know an old wife has and poor,
Her fags scarce held together;
There came a stranger to the door,
And it was windy weather.*

LADY KATE sat before a great blazing fire of fragrant logs, which burnt in the low grate of her spacious chamber. She had taken off her velvet dress and her ornaments, and was wrapped from throat to heels in a dressing robe of mauve-coloured silk; her glorious golden hair floated down her shoulders, far below her waist.

Behind her chair stood a brown-complexioned young person, with very black eyes and a rather pretty mouth, at the corners of which, however, lurked a sarcastic smile. The young person was very neatly dressed in black, moreover, with plain white collar and cuffs, and a white lace cap was on her head.

She held a large brush in her hand—she was employed in very softly brushing out the wealth of Lady Kate's hair. Lady Kate had a newspaper in her hand, which she was reading by the light of the branch candles that were fixed on either side of the marble mantelpiece.

The sleeping chamber of Lady Kate, the only child of her parents, was a beautifully-appointed apartment: the couches and chairs of blue satin damask, faded to a greenish yellow, had all been covered with a lively chintz of chastely-harmonised hues; the carpet was of faded crimson velvet pile, a square in the centre of the polished oak floor; the toilette-table was of rosewood and marble.

A bath-room, inlaid with exquisitely-painted tiles representing the four seasons, led out of the sleeping room; the curtains were of the same chintz as the chair covers. The bed was an ancient fourpost of richly-carved rosewood; and the hangings were of pure white muslin, trimmed with white lace over some pale rose-coloured silk lining of the same tone as the chintz.

There was an exquisite writing-table, a cabinet loaded with beautiful, quaint, old china; and, lastly, a small book-case with glass doors, through which could be read the titles of some of the works of Lady Kate's favourite authors. These books were handsomely bound in costly bindings.

All at once Lady Kate threw the paper down and leaned back.

"Please to brush hard," she said. "As hard as you can. I love the sensation of somebody brushing my hair."

The maid obeyed; and Lady Kate folded her white hands one over the other and remained for a time with closed eyes, giving herself up to the luxurious sensation of having her long hair brushed out. And, meanwhile, the sarcastic smile on the maid's lip intensified. It was not at all a pleasant expression, nor one which would please either man, woman, or child to think was worn habitually by one whom they trusted.

Now, Lady Kate was a warm-hearted, rather hot-brained young damsel of eighteen summers, and she trusted this young woman, her maid, seven years older than herself, implicitly.

"Cissy," said Lady Kate, "I want to have my fortune told."

Miss Cecilia Pomfret was always called Pomfret in the family by command of the countess, but, in the small kingdom of her own chamber, Lady Kate reigned supreme, and here it pleased her to call Cecilia by the friendly name of Cissy.

"Nothing but good can befall you, Lady Kate. Why should you, a young lady whose fortune is made, care to be told anything else, when your life is so superbly planned out for you? I thought you were the happiest of the happy, Lady Kate."

"I don't know if I am or if I am not, Cissy; I have always supposed that the elder people knew best who have planned everything for me. I am to marry the eldest son of a French duke of the highest nobility. Certainly titles count for nothing in France now under the Republic, but in England and elsewhere, and all over the Continent I shall be known as the Marquise de St. Germaine at first, and then as the Duchesse de Montalbert when my husband becomes Duke de Montalbert. But you know, of course, Cissy, that it is not only these titles that my parents covet for me, but the old Duke is the richest man in Europe: he owns a great bank at Strasbourg in Germany, and he has mines in Siberia—silver mines; besides, he has shares in railways, and companies, and collieries, and fisheries in England, Scotland, and Wales. Then he has huge estates in the wine-growing districts of France, near Bordeaux. It is rare to be able to add wealth like that to one of the oldest family names and titles in Europe. The duke has a palace at Florence, another at Rome, a villa at Lake Como, a chateau in Switzerland, a grand hotel in Paris, estates and an ancient chateau in Normandy. He has two hundred thousand a year, and I am to marry his son and inherit all that wealth."

By this time the maid was busily plaiting Lady Kate's hair into one long plait; she did not speak until she had tied it with a knot of ribbon, then she said:

"There is no doubt one's happiness depends mainly on having plenty of money; those who say otherwise are, idiots, or else they tell falsehoods."

"Only," said Lady Kate, "I can't understand why it is necessary for me to be so very rich. I should be satisfied with half that wealth, or a quarter of it—or less than a quarter of it."

She sighed.

"You see, Cissy," she said, presently, "I have really never thought much about it until tonight."

"Then," said Cissy, demurely, "I know what some people would think immediately—that your ladyship had met or seen somebody who had struck your fancy, and made you say to yourself, 'I hope the French marquis is as nice as this person.'"

Lady Kate's lovely fair face flushed crimson from the roots of her golden hair to her snowy, rounded chin; and Cecilia, the maid, watched her with her black eyes that were always taking notes of everything that concerned Lady Kate, like a couple of suspicious detectives as they were.

"You go too far, Pomfret," said Lady Kate, haughtily.

She felt supremely annoyed at the insinuation, for she would not have admitted even to her own heart that she took more than a passing interest in the obscure stranger.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," said Cecilia, meekly, and the keen, black eyes looked down on the carpet.

"Now I must have a cup of milk or chocolate, and a piece of thin toast and an egg," said Lady Kate, "for I feel starved."

"Allow me to suggest an egg beaten up in a glass of port wine, and some thin, dry toast," said Miss Pomfret; "you need some support after your fright and exposure."

This was quite true, so Lady Kate sat by the fire and stared at it while the maid left the room to prepare the wine and egg and toast. When she brought it to Lady Kate there was a bright gleam in the young beauty's eyes. She took the china cup and silver spoon from Miss Pomfret, and she said, with a smile:

"I have made up my mind I will have my fortune told. I have been reading about an old man in Paris whom all the great people consult about the future. Now there must be some kind of soothsayer of the same sort here in London. Will you find out if there is such a person?"

Miss Pomfret's keen black eyes still rested on the floor.

"I need not seek," she said; "I know already of such a person—an old woman, who tells

as truly what is to happen to you as—as if she held the keys of Fate herself, and could unlock all secrets; but you must do what she tells you, Lady Kate.”

Here the black eyes were raised from the floor and were fixed on Lady Kate with a strangely sinister expression.

“If you don’t do what she tells you you will be almost certain to die a violent death.”

Lady Kate felt her heart beat desperately.

“Oh, Pomfret,” she said, “what nonsense you talk. I don’t want any horrors, any tragedies, nothing but a few questions answered, and you must know—you are too sensible not to know—that I could never undertake to promise to do whatever an ignorant old woman told me to do.”

“If your ladyship thinks her ignorant,” she said, “it is absurd to consult her.”

“I should never promise to do what anybody told me to do,” said Lady Kate, “not even my husband if I had one. Now if you please, Pomfret, I will go to bed.”

“I hope your ladyship liked the egg and the wine,” said Pomfret.

“Yes,” replied her young ladyship, shortly.

Soon after this the maid left her for the night, but it was many hours before the excited young beauty was able to rest, and when she did sink down into what Tennyson calls the “gulphs of sleep,” the night almost touched the skirts of the morning.

The Earl of Belgrave had been the eldest of four brothers—the Ormonds. Their family estate was called The Waldron; it was situated in a bleak district of Cumberland; it was not a rich estate, but the family name was almost as old as the hills that surrounded the old castle.

Lord Ormond and his four brothers were called the wildest scamps in Christendom. They ran through all the money that the old earl, their father, had. All four younger brothers died childless—two were killed in duels abroad, one died of fever in Africa, another was drowned while bathing; the eldest brother, the father of Kate, was an elderly man when he came into the earldom and the mortgaged estate of The Waldron, with its picturesque castle in Cumberland; also he became the possessor of the family mansion in Grosvenor Square, with its pictures, its plate, and its various curiosities in old china and antique furniture.

But the rent-roll of The Waldron was a miserably small one, for the heavy mortgages were eating into the very heart of the property, and then the new earl contracted a marriage with a Scotch beauty, an heiress of ancient but untitled family.

The lady in question, a Miss Bruce, was cold as a statue, haughty as a queen, ambitious, and craving a title as the greatest of earthly boons. Thus she sold herself, her fortune, and her beauty to a man broken in constitution, twenty years her senior, and with an impoverished estate in order to obtain the right to subscribe herself Constance Countess Belgrave. Her fortune cleared off the greater portion of the mortgage on The Waldron estate, but after all her life was a compromise between show and splendour and comparative poverty.

She became the mother of one child, Kate, the heroine of this story, but her hopes of a son and successor to the title were doomed to be disappointed. As Kate grew up the ambitious countess centred all her hopes of worldly greatness on her lovely daughter. There was no male heir to take the title of earl, and, in consequence, Lady Kate would become the Countess of Belgrave in her own right on the death of her father.

Under these circumstances a countess in her own right, and possessed of a beauty which would set the world wondering when once the young lady took her place among the stars of the season, Lady Kate had, the countess thought, a right to make a most splendid match. The countess was a woman of business, a diplomatist, a woman of measures, and she ruled her husband, who was now old and in broken health, most completely.

Thus she contrived to enter into negotiations with the rich Duke of Montalbert, who had one son, a blasé man of thirty-five, who wished to marry an English beauty of noble family. This Marquis de St. Germaine, having seen the likeness of the Lady Kate, expressed his willingness to be introduced to her; and, further, stated that if the young lady proved as charming as her photograph, he should be glad to make her the marquise and one day the Duchesse of Montalbert. And Lady Kate had seen the photograph of the marquis. She had not liked it much, but she had been taught from her cradle by her countess mother that girls of the aristocracy never have any choice in these matters.

More than that, the countess had impressed on the young girl the idea that it showed a plebeian origin in a woman if she ever had a preference for one man above another; that a lady of noble birth always allowed her parents to choose her husband for her, and in short that a girl “in love” was a most degraded being.

“That sort of thing, Kate, is reserved for dressmakers and servants and the daughters of tradespeople.”

And up to that night when Lady Kate met Cecil she had believed all this.

“Cissy,” said Lady Kate, the next morning (Kate had just emerged from her bath-room; she looked fresh as the goddess of morning)—“Cissy, to-day take me to the old woman who tells fortunes.”

(To be Continued.)

THE BUILDING EXHIBITION.

On the 12th of April an exhibition under the above title was opened at the Agricultural Hall, Islington. The scope of this exposition of the arts allied to building is a wide one. Primarily, of course, all materials employed for or processes involved in house construction form its staple. But the promoters of the enterprise have not stopped there. They have embraced in their design exhibits of any kind which go to render the mere bare walls of a building the “home, sweet home,” of our old and ever-popular song. This will be seen by the following enumeration of the various sections into which exhibits have been received.

Section I. Architectural drawings, plans, and models. Section II. Construction.—Bricks, stone, concrete, wood, &c., and sanitary appliances in pottery or concrete; also constructive ironwork. Section III. Engineering.—Machinery and engineering appliances.—Taps, valves, hot water and steam-heating stoves, &c., and metal sanitary appliances. Section IV. Decoration.—Wall papers, paints in oil and tempera, window-glass staining, plaster and papier mâché ornaments, encaustic tiles, &c., marble and terra-cotta, and carved woodwork. Section V. Furniture and portable decorative articles, including busts, pottery, metal work, turned ornaments in wood, stone, or metal, &c.

The response of exhibitors was in general very hearty, and in most of the sections the various classes of goods were well represented. Of course our limited space and the untechnical scope of a journal like the LONDON READER precludes all but the most cursory glance. In the first class, embracing woodwork and joinery, are very many interesting exhibits, necessarily appealing most to the trades concerned. To the second class, which includes bricks, stone, concrete, &c., the same remark applies. Still technical in character, yet of more interest to the general visitor, is the third class, in which are found various machines in motion or otherwise, employed in the production or fabrication of building materials. Amongst exhibitors here we may mention Messrs. Reynolds & Co., Messrs. Brainsby & Co., of Peterborough, Messrs. Ransome, and a very good selection of wood-working machines at the stand of Messrs. Powis, Bale & Co, the principal of which enterprising firm is so well known as a popular writer on such subjects.

In the fourth class, which comprises terra cotta, glass and decorations, are some very attractive exhibits. Messrs. Jeffreys, the celebrated paper-stainers of Essex Road, Islington, make a good display of their beautiful wall-papers, many of which are designed specially for them by the facile pencil of Mr. Walter Crane. Their buff and slate flock papers are noticeable from the fact that their pile is so firm that after they have been on the walls or ceiling for three or four years they will bear painting either in self or varied colours, and possess then almost unlimited durability. In the same department are good exhibits of the various permanent and innocuous paints of the Silicate Paint Company. In this connection also we may mention Messrs. S. & E. Ransome’s indurating solutions for the cure of damp walls, roofs, &c., which have for their basis prepared silicate and calcium, and whose efficacy has been tested by years of trial.

Amongst portable building materials we may notice the patent asphalted felt of Messrs. Engel and Rolfe as a capital light and waterproof roof covering and wall protector. Passing on to the fifth class we find builders’ ironmongery well represented (stoves are found generally in the eighth class). The collection of sanitary appliances (the sixth class) is also good. Mr. Bostell’s patent “Excelsior” closet may be noted as a capital combination of efficiency and simplicity. In the seventh class, which embraces constructive ironwork, are many articles of interest, and the eighth class (marble chimney-pieces, stoves, &c.) is remarkably good. Some of the marble mantelpieces here exhibited are indeed chefs-d’œuvre of magnificence, and of necessity correspondingly costly. Messrs. Wells and Co. (whose display is one of the most extensive in the building) and Messrs. Ashton and Green have some fine works of this description. Enamelled slate mantelpieces, painted indelibly to imitate marble, and highly polished, are hardly to be distinguished from the genuine material, and their prices are astonishingly reasonable.

Messrs. Ford and Margrett have some capital specimens of these. Stoves are found in great variety. Mr. T. Waller’s “patent fire-contracting stove” is an ingenious adaptation of moveable cheeks of iron faced with fire-clay, which enable the superficies of a drawing-room or other fire to be contracted or expanded according to the needs of the season. Mr. Clarke has some interesting exhibits, especially the “balanced gridiron grill stove.” The great hydrostatic grill stove in use at St. James’s Hall was fitted up by this firm, which also shows some enamelled floor tiles at very low prices. Messrs. Richard Evered and Co. sustain their well-earned repute for chandeliers, hall-lamps, and other fittings, and one great attraction of the Exhibition is the central stand whence Mr. Ritchie’s collection of clever gas-lighting and heating apparatus radiates warmth for far around. Indeed, this tasteful stall, with its pretty collection of evergreens and flowering plants and its ingeniously contrived exhibits, appeared one of the most popular in the building.

These stoves are remarkably well adapted for heating conservatories and offices, and with a consumption of only from 5 to 6 cubic feet of gas per hour, will, if kept burning 10 hours, raise the temperature of a chamber of 2,500 cubic feet capacity, 14 degrees Fahrenheit. They also eliminate all noxious products and vapours of the gas. Space compels us to conclude. We may just notice that Messrs. Avery and Co. have a good show of their “Empire” blinds and other specialties, that Balmain’s luminous paint, electric lighting, telephonic apparatus and many other novelties of general interest will well repay inspection, and that Mr. Engert’s remarkably clever apparatus for the improvement of sound, whether it be that of the human voice or of musical instruments, should not be overlooked. Taking the exhibition as a whole, we may fairly congratulate Mr. John Black, to whom the idea and working out of the enterprise are due, upon the success which has attended his initiation of a new departure in the history of exhibitions.



[TRUE FRIENDS.]

LOST THROUGH GOLD;

OR, A BEAUTIFUL SINNER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Frank Bertram's Wife," "Strong Temptation," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE VERDICT.

If thou faint in the day of adversity thy strength is small.

Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

ENGLISH BIBLE.

"NOT PROVEN." Slowly and distinctly the jury gave their verdict. On every ear in that densely crowded court the words fell clearly—"Not Proven." It was a verdict that satisfied no one. Those who cared for Alice knew that her life was surely blighted by it; that her days would be but one long assize, while the countess and her partisans considered she ought to have been found guilty.

The Aston mystery was just as much a mystery as ever. No other name was whispered of in connection with the crime. Alice Tracy had been tried, and her life was spared, but that life could never again be as it had been before this cruel accusation came.

Marmaduke Hardy looked anxiously at Dorothea to see how she bore the news, but to the widow the fact that the verdict was not "Guilty" brought such a vast relief that she could hardly understand the trouble yet in store for her friend.

"Poor girl," said Duke, simply. "Innocence has not triumphed."

"But she will be free," said Dora, with feverish anxiety; "they can never take her to prison again."

She rose quickly. The court was rapidly emptying. Duke offered her his arm.

"I am very sorry that we have failed," he assured her, with a strange new gentleness in his voice. "I never so wished to win a case myself as I did that Guy might win this one."

"It is not your fault. You did all you could."

She put her hand on his arm and looked round the Court.

"You want to go to her?" They threaded their way through the departing crowd until a warder directed them to a small room behind the Court. Here Duke stopped.

"I will wait for you here."

And so she entered alone. It often seemed to Dorothea that that moment was the bitterest of her whole life. She had seen Alice in prison; seen her in the calm anticipation of death, but she had never seen her as she was now.

On a wooden bench—her head resting on her hands, a dull, stony look in her blue eyes, a fixed, hard expression on her mouth—sat the girl whom George Arnold yet hoped to make mistress of Trent Park. She neither moved nor spoke when Dorothea entered; she did not even raise her eyes to see whom the intruder might be; she just sat on there in her strong despair. With a bitter pain at her heart for the sorrow she was so powerless to soothe, Dorothea went up to Alice, and bending down kissed her fondly once or twice, trying to raise the face she so persistently tried to bury.

"I will not let you forget that I am your friend," she cried, simply: "in sorrow as well as joy, that was our compact."

No answer. It seemed as though words would not come to Alice. Dorothea sat down by her and drew the tired, aching head to rest on her shoulder.

"Won't you speak to me, darling? Alice, you

know this makes no difference to my trust in you."

"I wish I were dead!" came from Alice Tracy, in a burst of anguish. "Oh, Dora, why didn't I die long ago before these troubles came? Their weight will break my heart. I am innocent, and yet I must live my life through as though I were guilty—a byword of reproach. Oh, death would have been more merciful than this!"

"Hush!" said Dora, in her low sweet voice. "Alice, the truth must be clear some day. Some day everyone will know that you are innocent. Be brave, my darling, and bear up nobly as you have done till now."

"It was easier then," answered Alice, with a sad pathos in her voice. "At least, I had the chance of being acquitted. If the—the worst had come it would soon have been only a dead sorrow. And now—"

"And now you are alive. Oh, Alice, don't you know we are glad to have you spared to us even thus?"

"It is so hard," with a burst of passionate tears. "Think of George. This shadow that has fallen on my life will blight his too. For all time we shall be separated. Each day that comes, each year that passes will find us wider apart. A gulf has risen up between us no effort and no time can bridge over. Winter and summer, spring and autumn, we must be separated; we love each other; we trust each other, and we must part."

"I should not part," answered Dorothea, resolutely. "If I loved any man as you do Mr. Arnold—I mean if anyone cared for me as he does for you, I should marry them, though the whole world tried to prevent it. When there is such love as that, people don't want society and acquaintances; they are enough for each other."

The hard, bitter look was dying out of Alice's face; the blue eyes softened to their old gentleness. Dorothea took advantage of the change.

"Come, we must be going."

"Going! Where to?" as one in a dream. "Why home, of course. I have some very comfortable rooms at an hotel, and we can be very cosy there for to-night. To-morrow we will go home to England."

"Will they take me in?" doubtfully—"a prisoner?"

"You are no one's prisoner but mine now. Come, dear."

She put her arm through Alice's and led her to the door. Duke Hardy stood outside as sentinel. Dora wondered dimly how much of their conversation he had overheard. He gave his hand to Alice and said, warmly:

"I hope you have not been worrying yourself about the verdict, Miss Tracy. We know you well enough to understand the jury ought to have said differently. Scotch trials are unfortunate in having this loophole for a third opinion."

Alice murmured some words of thanks. He gave her his arm and led her through the private passage to the entrance, where a close carriage was waiting. Dora followed them quickly. It was a relief to her that Duke jumped into the fly after them. Dearly as she loved Alice, she had her reasons just now for not wishing to be alone with her.

It was getting late when they found themselves in Mrs. Hardy's private sitting-room. Duke had not long to wait before that lady came in with her bonnet off, and her heavy walking-dress changed for a thin cashmere.

"She is coming presently," began Dorothea. "She asked me not to wait."

"How does she bear it?"

"She seems quite paralyzed by the blow. I think she would have preferred death."

"At twenty-three?"

"I am not much older," answered Dorothea, sadly, "and yet there are many times when I ask myself if life is worth the living for."

"You are morbid," said Duke, quickly. "I have told you over and over again that you ought to see a doctor."

"I wonder where Mr. Arnold is?"

"He's not a doctor."

"No. I was not thinking of that. I hoped he would be here to-night, that was all."

"Indeed?"

"I wonder how he bears it. It must be almost as great a blow for him as for her."

"What! You don't surely mean to say Arnold—"

"They have loved each other for months; they were to have been married at Easter if things had gone right."

"Why she was engaged to someone else."

"She never loved him. This engagement to Mr. Arnold is her own doing. The other match was a fancy of the countess, I believe."

"I begin to understand now why you and Arnold took such a fancy to each other."

A deep blush crimsoned Mrs. Hardy's cheek.

"You might have guessed it long ago, I should think. He haunted me morning, noon and night for nothing except to hear me talk about Alice."

"I'm sure I used to think he came to see you."

"You were mistaken," archly; "he came to confide his troubles to me."

"I don't blame him."

"I wonder if people imagine I have no troubles of my own; ever so many people I know confide their troubles to me. I'm sure I don't know why."

Duke Hardy believed he did know, but he did not volunteer the information, instead he asked his cousin's widow when she intended to leave Scotland.

"At once, if Alice is willing. I have had too much anxiety in the land of cake to care to prolong my stay in it; I have been wondering where we can go. I hardly like to go home."

"You can't stop away from The Grange all your life; you might as well sell the place at once."

"I shall never sell it, I have been too happy there."

The barrister wondered a little what had

made her so happy in her fair Kentish home, but he did not put the question, and silence settled on them.

"The best thing of all," began Duke Hardy, after a long pause, "would be for George Arnold to marry Miss Tracy at once, and take her abroad until people had forgotten the Aston mystery. It would never do for her to live at Keston, or any small place like that. She would be a perfect celebrity, people would be pointing her out to each other as the girl who killed Lord Aston and got off scot-free because she happened to be an earl's cousin. No, don't take Miss Tracy to Keston just yet; it may be George Arnold will take the care of her off your hands."

"I hope not, at present; I should miss her so."

"You did very well without her before."

"But, then, I had aunt."

"Is there any chance of Mrs. Stone coming back to England?"

"Not the slightest, she is too happy with her grandchildren; they have quite taken my place; but she writes me very kind letters—she is glad I have such a friend as Alice."

At that moment Alice came into the room and the trio took their seats at the tea-table. After those months of imprisonment it was very sweet to Alice to feel she was no longer at anyone's beck and call, but was as free as the bird in the air; that no dull prison claimed her as its own; but yet the meal was oppressively sad. Two of those who sat there could not forget the peril through which the third had passed, and she was busy with thoughts of the future, which seemed one hopeless blank.

She was a little hurt, too, that George Arnold was not there; true, she had meant to give him back his freedom, but a hope always lingered in her heart something might reunite them. Duke Hardy was the life and soul of that tea-table, what his companions would have done without him it was hard to say.

"When shall I see you at Keston?" he asked, when the tray had been removed.

"Hardly at present," answered Dorothea. "I mean to go abroad for two or three months with Alice."

"That's a new idea."

"Very; it has only just come into my head."

"And do you often act on impulse like that?" he inquired, laughing.

"Sometimes, not always," returned Dorothea, slowly; "things go wrong sometimes and then I can't."

"I must be saying good-bye soon," said Duke, "or I shall miss the mail."

"You are never going back to England to-night?"

"Indeed I am. I have a most important case on; they telegraphed for me to go at once."

"And so you're to travel all night—what a shame!" You need hardly be told this observation came from Dorothea.

"Thank you very much for coming," said Alice, earnestly, then, as Dorothea moved away to adjust the fire—she always felt so chilly, you remember—"tell me quickly, I can trust you, shall I do Dorothea any harm by staying with her now?"

"None whatever. Mrs. Hardy is above gossip. I see no reason why you should not live with her altogether, only it must not be at Keston."

"She must not give up her home for me," decided Alice, quietly.

"I fancy of the two, you and The Grange, she rather prefers the former," returned Duke; "but there is no telling what she is really, she always seems trying to disguise herself and her feelings, too."

They dropped the subject then, for Mrs. Hardy came back from rummaging in the coal-scuttle, and Duke thought it just as well she should not hear such personal remarks.

He stayed a few minutes longer and then took his leave—kindly, cordially of Alice, coldly, almost silently of Dorothea.

"He'll have a cold night journey," observed

Dora, pityingly, when he had gone. "I never expected he would come."

"It was very kind of him."

"I suppose no one is quite bad all over," remarked Dorothea, in a very prosaic manner.

"Don't you like him any better than you did?"

Mrs. Hardy shook her head.

"I tried hard when he was so good to you, but I did not manage it. I don't think anything in the world could make Duke Hardy and me friends."

Alice wondered why a little uncomfortably.

"I have something to tell you, dear," began Dora, affectionately. "Mr. Arnold is coming to-morrow early. He wants to say good-bye to you himself. I fancy he was too upset to come to-night."

"Good-bye?"

"Only good-bye for a time. He is going back to Halsted, chiefly that he may keep his eye on Lady Aston. He believes firmly that she knows more than she cares to tell about the poor earl's death."

"I thought I should have died to-day," breathed Alice, "as she looked at me. Her cold, cruel eyes seemed fixed on me as though she were trying to do me some injury. I think, Dora, Sybil would kill me if she could."

"She looks cruel enough for anything, and yet how lovely she is. I can quite understand your cousin marrying her just for her face. Whatever her mind may be she is, at least, a Beautiful Sinner."

"Have you seen much of her?"

"I have seen her once to speak to. The strange part of it is that she persists in remaining at The Manor. I should have thought she would have been only too glad to go away."

"Dora."

There was such a pleading, pitiful entreaty in the voice that Dorothea knew no light question was coming.

"What is it, dear?"

"Do you think in giving George up I am giving him up to her? I have been pondering over everything a great deal lately, Dora, and I think I see it all now. I am sure Lady Aston loved George long ago—perhaps he never knew it—and that is why she hated me so. Oh, Dora! I can bear to give him up to save him from the shadow that is blighting my life; but I cannot bear to give him up to her."

"Be easy," said Dorothea, soothingly. "I am sure Mr. Arnold would never care for such a woman as Lady Aston. Besides, Alice, his whole heart is yours."

A long, long pause. You might have heard the ticking of the clock. Dora did hear the beating of Alice's heart as they sat side by side.

"Dear," she began, when the silence was growing painful to them, "I must take you away from here. Where shall we go?"

"Where you please, Dora."

Dora shook her head.

"That would be home, and we can't go home quite yet. I must take you abroad first. What do you say to spending Easter at Rome?"

"May I, Dora? Is it possible that you and I can go about together without the shadow of my disgrace falling on you?"

Dorothea was silent for a minute. When she did speak her voice had a strange sadness.

"Alice, I know quite well what you mean. There are people so harsh and cruel that they will never believe you innocent until the real murderer be discovered. I dare say if they met us together they would shut both of us equally, but I don't care. In all the world there is no one my doings can affect. If the whole population of England cut me dead I am proud enough to bear it without a pang."

"But—"

"But I don't expect such a thing will happen. I am young and I have a good income that nothing can deprive me of, therefore I can do things impossible to a lady with a bare pittance to subsist on. If I were a portionless damsel trying to get married I might need to be careful. As it is I can defy public opinion—"

Dorothea stopped abruptly for half a minute, then she went on in a different tone:

"That's the advantage of being alone in the world. One is so perfectly free; there is no husband to order one about."

"And you like your freedom?"

"Yes."

And yet within her heart she was conscious she preferred bondage and love.

"Alice," she began again, as a sudden thought struck her, "you can't run away from Mr. Arnold however much you wish to. You are joint guardians to the children you know."

"But the children are with Mrs. Brown until Lady Aston leaves The Manor."

"She won't do that for nine whole months."

"It may be nine whole years, aye, and my whole life too before my innocence is believed," said Alice, simply, "and till that day I will be no man's wife."

"You are too proud."

"Am I? Would you not do the same?"

"No. If I loved a man nothing in the world should keep me from him, provided he loved me just as I loved him."

"And George is coming to-morrow?"

"Yes. He may prevail on you to be less severe. After he has seen you he will go straight to Halsted, and I should think the next day we might start for Rome."

"Won't it cost a great deal of money, Dora?"

"Not more than I can afford, child. You're something of an heiress yourself now. Ten thousand pounds Lord Aston left you in his will."

"I wish he hadn't. They wouldn't say such cruel things, perhaps, but for this money."

"People say cruel things when they've a mind to," returned Dora, equably. "It's the custom of the nineteenth century."

They sat on by the cheerful fire long into the night, talking much of the trial and its results, somewhat of George Arnold, but nothing at all of the one person whom, without knowing it, Dorothea was learning to love as she had never loved before.

Dora drew bright visions of their life together in the eternal city. Essentially hopeful it seemed to the widow. They had only to wait a little while and Lord Aston's murderer must be found.

Ah, Mrs. Hardy! your golden visions were not realised. You and Alice never stood together on the fair hills of Rome, and the cruel being that administered the poison to the kindly old earl never stood before a magistrate to answer for the evil deed. Alice Tracy was the only person ever tried for Lord Aston's murder.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PRESENTIMENTS.

Had we never loved me kindly,
Had we never loved me blindly,
Never loved and never parted,
We had ne'er been brokenhearted.

BURNS.

The morning after the trial Dorothea awoke with a dim foreboding of coming trouble. The night before the jury's verdict had weighed but little on her spirits; it had been such an intense relief to her that her friend was to be spared to her that she had had no room for other thoughts. Even now it was hardly the "Not Proven" of the twelve chosen men that troubled her so much as an undefined sense of trouble.

Her sleep had been restless and disturbed; she had had many rambling, unconnected dreams, she could hardly remember one of them; she did not know whether they concerned herself or Alice. All she felt sure of was that in each the beautiful face of Lord Aston's young widow had appeared with a mocking laugh on her red lips, a laugh, the very thought of which made Mrs. Hardy's blood run cold.

She dressed quickly, she was no strong-minded heroine, this strange, variable, yet always lovable, mistress of The Grange. She longed to

hear the sound of a friendly voice, to feel the touch of a friendly hand after that troubled, restless night, and so she hurried over her toilet and crossed the landing to Alice's room.

Early as it was Miss Tracy was up. She sat at a writing table enwrapped in a warm blue dressing-gown, which really belonged to Dorothea herself, her golden hair hung loosely over her shoulders, and there was an expression of wonderful calm on her fair face.

"I was obliged to come," began Mrs. Hardy, in explanation of her sudden appearance. "I had the most wretched night—dreaming the whole time, and now I am as tired as if I had never closed my eyes. I thought something dreadful had happened, and I felt I must just come and see you were all safe."

"Did you think I should run away?" speaking with a lightness she was far from feeling, because she could read the nervous anxiety written in her friend's clear eye.

"I don't know what I think. You look better than you did yesterday, Alice."

"And you look worse, Dora, much worse. What have you been about to get such circles round your eyes?"

"I don't know," languidly; "Alice, do you think there was a railway accident last night?"

"No; whatever made such an idea come into your head?"

"I thought something might have happened to Duke Hardy."

A dim suspicion came to Alice Tracy that her friend's mind was getting too full of Mr. Hardy but she said never a word of it.

"You will be better, dear, when you have had some breakfast."

"Let's go downstairs," impatiently. "Were you writing?"

"I was trying to write to George," tearing up a few strips of paper which lay on the table. "I thought it might be less painful for us both."

Dorothea shook her head.

"You had better see him, dear; you cannot avoid him for ever; you two must meet some day. I think the sooner you meet the better for you both."

Alice yielded; she twisted her hair into a soft coil, exchanged her wrapper for a plain black dress, and stood ready to follow her friend. Almost by common consent the two avoided the subject of George Arnold; both felt it to be a painful one. They sat for some time after breakfast in perfect silence, then, after a glance at her watch, Mrs. Hardy rose.

"You had better see him alone, dear." She pressed one kiss on the girl's forehead and left her.

Quick as lightning the girl's thoughts flew back to the last time she had seen George Arnold alone. She had been then another's affianced wife, a bride with her wedding day fixed; she had been hourly expecting the man whom she was to swear to love, honour, and obey.

In fancy's eyes she saw again the beauty of that summer evening, herself and George alone in the twilight, heard his loved voice urging her in spite of all to be his. Ever since she had known what love was she had loved George. Ralph Gordon's death had left her free to accept his love, and now this awful trouble had risen up to separate them.

It seemed to Alice that no sorrow was like unto her sorrow, no trouble so great as this love which must not be anything but vain. In all those summer wanderings in Trent Park, in all those later meetings at The Manor, they had never been free; they were free now, and their freedom was in vain.

A footstep she knew too well, a firm tread she had listened to too often to mistake, then her two little hands were clasped in two strong ones.

"Alice!"

"George!"

It was all they said, but, oh, what a world of meaning was in those two words. Her blue eyes looked fearlessly into his clear, dark ones; if ever George Arnold had hoped that Alice would accept his sacrifice and let him, by marrying

her, share the disgrace which had come upon her, he knew now he was mistaken.

Alice would have given him her life, she would have worn the title of his wife as the highest honour earth could offer her; but she would do nothing that should cause him to hold his head less highly among his fellow men, nothing that should cast even a breath of shame upon the grand old name he loved so well.

"Alice!"

The word came from him in his anguish like a bitter cry; he would have taken her so gladly just as she was, would have shared her troubles and soothed her sorrows, would have held to her in good report and ill report had she only so suffered him.

She spoke no word, she loved him so that her lips could not frame the sentence that should part them; but, despite her silence, her resolution never once wavered. George Arnold knew her determination just as well as if she had spoken it. He held her hands fast clasped in his, and looked reproachfully into the depths of her blue eyes.

"Will you not speak to me?" he asked, at last. "Have you no word of greeting for me?"

For all answer she burst into tears. There with happiness so high her, and yet so utterly beyond her reach, her very heart felt near to breaking. No moment of her life had ever been so bitter to her as this, when George Arnold stood before her with the lovelight shining in his eyes, and she must for his own sake refuse to listen.

"What can I tell you that you do not know?" she asked, with a sad weariness in her sweet voice. "I love you—I shall love you while my life lasts. But what can come of it. Nothing but sadness and disappointment."

"Not if you love me well enough to yield your will to mine."

She looked at him in mute appeal.

"Don't doubt my love, George; it would be too cruel. I could bear anything but that."

"Be my wife, darling. Let me have the best right of all to defend you from every unkind word, every petty slight. Alice, I ask nothing better than to spend my life in so defending you."

"How can I ever repay you for your trust? George, I think if you had doubted me I must have died."

"While I live I shall believe in you as the best and purest of women. Darling, let me give you the shelter of my name; let me spend my days in an endeavour to make you happy?"

She shook her head sadly.

"I have a heavy burden to bear. It would make it ten times heavier for you to bear it too."

"It would be only for a little while. The truth must be discovered some day."

She shook her head sorrowfully.

"I have almost ceased to believe it, George. I think all my life long I shall bear the brunt of it."

"Even so," he said, hoarsely. "I would rather have you than lose you. Alice, why won't you believe me?"

"You love me," answered the girl, simply; "you love me so that you would bear anything for my sake; but disgrace shall never come to you through me."

"Then you persist in sending me away?"

"If you should be right; if my cousin's real murderer ever were found out; if the stain could be wiped off my name, then you could come back again if you liked."

"And in the meanwhile?"

Her blue eyes, yet wet with tears, shone brightly.

"I am sure of myself, whether our probation last a few months or till my life's end. I know nothing can change my love. While my life lasts my heart will be yours and yours only."

"At least, then, you will not break off our engagement?"

"Were we ever engaged?" she asked, half dreamily. "I thought we only loved each other."

She was little conscious of the implied irony of her words.

"You shall marry me some day, Alice, however long we wait."

She smiled with a strange wistful smile.

"I am your promised wife," she murmured, gently. "If the day ever comes when I can hold my head bravely before my fellows, I will gladly redeem my words."

"And if not?" very firmly.

"If not, we must look forward to being together some day in a land where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage."

He drew her to a close embrace. She never resisted. She was his promised wife, if for a time troubles prevented that promise from being fulfilled. His arms were her rightful home, though now she was an exile away from them. Her head fell back on his shoulders, her breath fanned his cheek, and, as he held her thus, a wild wish came to her heart, that she could die thus safe in the shelter of his embrace.

No sound broke the silence of that embrace. There is a love too deep for expression; a sorrow too great for words. Both knew this was their parting; both—when this last sad interview was over—would probably recall many things they wished to say, but they thought of none of them now; they only felt the bitter sorrow of the parting which was so imminent.

Minutes passed. Time seemed to fly, and all the while that golden head rested on George Arnold's broad shoulder. The ticking of a clock recalled them to themselves, to the exigencies of the nineteenth century. They had been alone together fully two hours. For all this time Mrs. Hardy had kindly absented herself from the room, but she might return at any minute.

"Alice," said George Arnold, as he released her and placed her on the sofa, "you are sending me away; but I cannot go without some hope."

"What hope can I give you? I have none myself, George."

"Promise me three things," he urged, "and I shall leave you with less misery."

"I would promise anything in the world that would lessen your misery."

"If ever you should change your mind," he began, in a voice which shook with emotion, "if ever you should feel as I feel now, that our love is too real and great a thing to be crushed by the opinion of the world, send for me at once. Don't mind changing your mind; don't think any time can alter my feelings. Write to me 'come,' and that very day I shall be with you."

She gave the required pledge solemnly, her voice clear and low; then her blue eyes sought his face as though to ask the nature of the second and third promises demanded of her.

"Remember you are not your own. You are mine; my future wife. Take care of yourself for my sake."

He was so long before he went on to the third desire that Alice had to repeat her question.

"The Arnolds are not a long-lived race, and I am no longer a very young man. Alice, if it should be that I do not last on to the time when your name is cleared from all share in the Aston mystery, will you at last give in then and let me call you wife before I die?"

She never pretended to misunderstand him. She answered at once:

"Yes."

And then the moment both had dreaded at last arrived. There was a rustle of silken skirts, and then the door opened softly and Dorothea Hardy entered. One who have already learnt something of her character in these pages can guess just what she said.

How, without touching directly on their trouble, she yet continued to show them they had her perfect sympathy. If Alice could have loved Dora more than she had done through all the weary months of her imprisonment, she would have loved her more now.

"I am returning to Halsted this afternoon," George said, after a few minutes, to Mrs. Hardy. "Can I do anything there for you?"

"Thank you, I have no commission. I brought away everything from the 'Royal

James." I felt, however things ended, we should not care to stay in Halsted for some time."

"You take her with you then?" his eyes following Alice, who had just left the room. "Is it your intention to return to Keston?"

"No. There are too painful associations there now. It was at The Grange Alice first heard of the Aston mystery. I am going to take her abroad for a few months. No one knows what might turn up while we are gone."

"You are very hopeful."

"Am I?" with a strange sadness in her voice. "And yet it often seems to me I have very little to be hopeful about."

"How am I to be thankful enough to you for all your kindness to my poor darling?"

"Perhaps some day by making her happy."

"She will not come down again," he said at last, rising very reluctantly. "I suppose we have said our last good-bye. Mrs. Hardy, if any trouble comes to her, will you let me know?"

"Indeed I will," little thinking how soon she would be called upon to fulfil her promise; "but be more cheerful, Mr. Arnold; don't begin by expecting bad news."

"I cannot help it," he answered, simply. "I have upon me a strong presentiment of evil."

And his words recalled to Dora her own feelings of the morning, and it was only with the greatest difficulty she prevented herself from saying:

"And so have I."

Alas, only too soon both presentiments were destined to be fulfilled. Bitter trouble was coming over the golden head they loved so well. Alice Tracy's cup of suffering as yet was far from full.

(To be Continued.)

THE STRANGER GUEST.

A SWEET unrest that is not pain,
In a sad heart where grief has lain;
By its sweet presence new and rare,
Proves that a stranger guest is there.

A mingling of new hopes and fears,
And smiles that shine through mist of tears;
A guest has entered in unbid,
And in the heart's recesses hid.

A guest that unacknowledged dwells,
And by its strange disquiet tells,
The secret of the sweet unrest,
Lies in the name of the stranger guest.

An unrest—neither joy nor pain,
Like day of neither sun nor rain;
A fluttering like a prisoned bird,
When some free warbler's note is heard.

A trembling like a hunted deer,
When finding its pursuer's near,
Turns with a look in pleading eyes,
Of startled wonder and surprise.

A restlessness when some are by,
The unwonted drooping of the eye,
The avoided mention of a name,
Or tell-tale blushes at the same.

The sweet unrest that is not pain,
In a sad heart where grief has lain,
Is nestling like a frightened dove,
A stranger guest whose name is love.

A. J. G.

UNDER WATER.

SPIDERS enjoy a curious provision of Nature which enables them to live under water. The creature goes to the surface of the water and moves all its legs busily, just as if it were trying to crawl out of the water. Suddenly it gives a sharp jerk or kick, and dives below the surface.

It then looks exactly as if it were surrounded by a case of polished silver, owing to a bubble of air which it has enclosed between its long hind legs. Besides this there are a number of smaller bubbles which cling to the other legs, and which can be added to the principal bubble when needed. This supply of air is sufficient to last the spider for a considerable time.

A PRETTY RHINE LEGEND.

ONCE upon a time there lived beside the Rhine a beautiful young lady. She had a lover who loved her, and who loved her in return. But after he had wooed her—not one year—but ten—he asked her to marry her, and she, anxious to show her power, merely answered:

"Wait."

"I have waited three years," he said, "but at your bidding I will wait one more—just one more."

Then he went away and became a soldier, and praise of his bravery filled his land; but the lady was piqued by the thought that he had been able to leave her for even a year, and when he returned she determined to punish, though all the while she loved him well. He knelt at her feet, and took her hands in his and said:

"Lady, I have come to claim you for my wife."

But all she answered was:

"Wait longer. A patient waiter is no loser."

"I will wait two years longer," he said, calmly. "If I do not lose, all is well."

Then he left her again. She had hoped that he would plead with her, and that she would be forced to change her mind; but now he was gone—gone for two long years. How she lived through them she could not tell; but they passed and again he stood before her.

"I have waited patiently," was all he said.

The lady yearned to cast herself into his arms, but pride was strong within her.

"Wait longer," she said.

"No," he answered, "this is the last time. If I wait now I wait for ever."

At this she drew back haughtily.

"Then wait for ever," she said, coldly.

He left her without a word. And now her heart sank in her bosom. She wept bitter tears, and repented in dust and ashes. When a year had gone by she could bear it no longer, and sent a little page to her old lover, bidding him bear this message:

"Come back to me."

But the little page brought back this message:

"Wait."

Again she was left to her sorrow, and two more years glided by; then once more she bade her page ride over the mountains to her lover's castle.

The page went and returned. He stood before his lady and doffed his cap, and repeated the message that had been given him:

"The patient waiter's not a loser."

"He is now punishing me," thought the lady, and for two years longer she remained in her castle.

Her heart was breaking, her health failed, and she knew that death was near. Again she sent her cruel lover a message.

"Tell him," said she, "that I am near my end, and that if I wait longer before I see him I shall wait for ever."

The page returned, and stood beside his lady's chair. His eyes were full of tears; his head was bent upon his breast; he sighed and hid his face in his plumed hat. The lady lifted her wan face.

"Speak!" she said. "The message!"

"Alas!" sighed the page; "I would it were a more tender one."

"Whatever it may be, speak!" gasped the lady.

"The only message that I have," replied the page "is, 'Wait for ever!'"

"I am well paid in my own coin," said the

lady. "At last I have received all my own answers back."

In a little while she died, and they buried her in the churchyard, with a stone at her head and a stone at her feet.

When spring came there was a grass upon the grave, and there also was a new plant strange to those who looked upon it—a plant with dark, glossy leaves, that crept slowly but surely along, clutching fast to every rough surface it met. There had never been a plant like that on earth before. Now we call it the ivy, but this is what those who saw it for the first time said of it.

"It is the lady whom her lover bade to wait for ever. In this form she is creeping towards his castle slowly but surely. So she will creep on until she reaches the heart she threw away."

Generations have passed away. The castle is a ruin, covered with ivy, and the peasants will tell you that it crept there from the lady's grove, point by point, over stone and rock, through the graveyard and over gates and fences. You can trace it if you choose, they say; but you do not try.—H.

ENCOURAGE SELF-RESPECT.

A CHILD that is constantly snubbed and thwarted in his wishes cannot be amiable. In fact, a child should never be snubbed. Think for a moment what is the effect a hasty word may make on his disposition. The little one may come to you when you are worn out by toil, tired from mental labour, engaged in reading or in conversation, or busied with some perplexing task, and trouble you with an innocent question. If you are vexed, don't show it; don't fret; don't look cross; don't speak hastily; answer the question as well as you can—some questions that children ask are not easily answered—and send the child away kindly. Its pleasant face will diffuse light and love over the whole house and do you a better service than you at the time being may be aware of.

A frown, a rebuke, even the slightest check will show its effect on the child's countenance, and you may be sure it goes deeper than you can see, and lasts longer than you think. Self-respect is the foundation of character, and should be sedulously cultivated. Better that than the education of the schools or fortunate business connections, high birth or influential friends. These are all well as adjuncts, but altogether they are less to be desired than that self-respect which begets confidence, energy and self-reliance. Destroy that quality in a child by a course of persistent snubbing, and you are tolerably sure to spoil his character for life.

USES OF PAPER.

So accustomed are we to the use—and abuse—of paper, that we hardly realise its immense importance and value. We are all, high and low, rich and poor, benefited by it. It is almost as necessary to our comfortable existence as the air we breathe, the food we eat, or the water we drink. It is the medium by which we bring those near who are distant from us, and by which we intercommunicate wishes, plans, purposes, and business one with another. It makes educational facilities practicable; it furnishes the books we read, and with which we transact all commercial business; it becomes the messenger which gives us our daily, weekly, and monthly news and public comment; it represents our money values, and, with the aid of the printing press, passes as a monied currency in nearly all civilised lands. The commercial world, the literary world, the mechanical, manufacturing, and mercantile worlds, and others of less importance, would be almost valueless, and of but little account, without the ability to command the use of a sheet of paper. It is voice, hearing and eyesight to humanity.

TIME'S REVENGE; OR, FOILED AT THE LAST.

CHAPTER XIII.

STORM AND SUNSHINE.

BEATTIE was full of delightful plans and projects, and arranged that Fayette was to be immediately spared by her new-found mother, and came on a visit of indefinite length to Altenham. Gerald Allenby said but little, letting Beattie excite herself and chatter away "like a magpie," he mentally observed, though he looked supremely appreciative, and led her on by his urbane air of courteous attention.

Fayette felt a languid pleasure in thinking that possibly her future might not be so sombre as the interview with her mother had induced her to think it would be. She went on the platform with Beattie and Mr. Allenby and stood by the carriage door even after Beattie was seated.

"It seems so strange," she said, as the guard went along, banging the doors and clicking them. "It hardly seems real."

"No, it is like a dream," Beattie agreed.

"All take your seats, please," cried the guard, as a civil hint to Gerald Allenby and Fayette.

Mr. Allenby shook hands in a fatherly way with Fayette, lifted his hat, and followed Beattie. He had not once given the faintest intimation to either girl that he knew anything of Margaret Lascelles.

Fayette stood back as the train moved, and watched its sinuous course as it puffed and snorted its way out of the station. Even when it had swept with rapid, snake-like movement round the curve, and the last throbbing echoes of the wheels had died into silence, she stood there, as if in a trance. At last she sighed deeply and turned away to return to Miss Ibbotson. For the time being she had absolutely forgotten her arranged visit to her mother. The train had proceeded some distance before a word was exchanged between the travellers.

"Do you object to smoking?" asked Gerald Allenby, carelessly.

"Not at all. I like it."

"You will not mind if I indulge in the luxury of a cigar?"

"Certainly not."

Gerald Allenby lighted a cigar in the most leisurely manner.

"Pretty part of the country," he remarked presently, looking at the lovely green panorama of meadow-land, farm houses, village streets, hayfields, hedges, wild wooded sylvan spots, unfolded as they raced by.

"I think it is beautiful; but I have never been so far away from home in my life before," answered Beattie.

"It is sultry to-day. I fancy we shall have a storm," Gerald Allenby proceeded.

He was undermining, trying to approach the subject he wished to reach cautiously.

"Yes. I thought we should have had a storm in the night," said Beattie.

"I was sorry I could not come last night—that reminds me."

"Auntie expected you."

"I could not help it. Business, my dear, is always interfering with my best laid plans. I was quite surprised to meet an old friend yesterday at your aunt's house."

Beattie became constrained directly, and discovered that her left glove was unbuttoned. It was a new glove, and new gloves are apt to be so tiresome.

"He seemed a little surprised to see me. Odd, isn't it, how one is always meeting people one knows in the most unexpected way?"

"I don't know. I—"

"Have been buried alive all your young life, eh? And you are now eighteen. Never mind. You must go about and enjoy yourself now."

Gerald Allenby had gone on a wrong line, so, instead of proceeding, looked out of window for a little while.

"I fancied—one is so apt to jump to conclusions—very absurd, and all that sort of thing—but I rather fancied—I don't know if I ought to say anything about it—but I imagined our young friend decidedly admired—what's the correct phrase?—admired your pretty relative."

Gerald Allenby was gazing off into space, apparently following the light spiral column of cigar smoke. So, naturally, he did not perceive that Beattie's face crimsoned all over.

"Pity for her if he goes on making an idiot of himself," Mr. Allenby went on, lightly. "That is to say, if she pays any heed to him. Young ladies, I am told, are sometimes apt to believe all a good-looking young fellow may choose to say to them—especially young ladies who live altogether in the country. But he is a notorious flirt, though he ought to behave himself, for he is half engaged to a beautiful heiress over our way. Perhaps he thinks he'll have his fling before he settles down."

It was a cowardly blow, dealt by a dastard's hand. The young recruit had come on the battle-field of life and the first wound had been dealt by a comrade. Gerald Allenby was steadily gazing afar off.

Naturally he did not perceive that his innocent adversary's face had grown deathly white, even to her lips. It was such a sudden shock. Beattie thought that her uncle, her father's nearest relative, could have no object, no reasonable motive, for deceiving her. He knew nothing about her. Till yesterday she had never heard of him.

For a few minutes there was a painful silence. Gerald Allenby did not expect any reply; he waited for his shot to take effect. But Beattie was no mere sentimental, love-sick girl. She had strong reasoning faculties, and with her deep, passionate love for Percy was mingled a good deal of half sisterly affection, the result of their early childish acquaintance.

Rapidly she traversed in her own mind the question of Percy's infidelity in thought, word, or deed. There must be some mistake on Uncle Allenby's part. That Percy was not a flirt she was absolutely certain. She boldly made a daring stroke, the colour slowly stealing into her face again.

"It is not Fayette, uncle, it is me," she said, very simply, though stammering over the words a good deal.

Gerald Allenby brought his eyes to bear on her with an almost jeering expression, while he tried to speak blandly. Her frankness had spoilt his plan of action so far.

"Oh, indeed. I am sorry to hear it. I wonder what Jessie Rochester will say? There will be a pulling of caps, eh? The fellow ought to feel awfully flattered, and all that sort of thing."

He seemed so confident about the beauty he had alluded to that Beattie's heart sank.

"Who is Jessie Rochester, uncle?" she asked, rather meekly.

"Ah—hum. Why, it's hardly worth while to describe her. You two will probably meet to-morrow or next day. Very handsome—for one thing; rides superbly; dances like—like an angel; though, I believe, angels don't dance, by the way. Yes, they do, though, on the point of a needle. All that sort of thing; I am such a poor hand at description."

Beattie's heart sank several degrees lower. There was something tangible when it was thus brought before her. Why had Percy never alluded to this girl? She racked her memory in vain for one glimmering recollection of the name. But, oh, surely there was some mistake. Yet the damask rose colour dimmed, and her eyes did not shine quite so brightly as before this little dialogue. It was one of those deadly blows which rankle even when they seem to have missed.

By degrees a silence fell on the two travellers, and each subsided into reverie. At last the train slackened and stopped at a station. Little accustomed to this variety and excitement, Beattie looked eagerly from the window on the

bustling groups at the wayside country station—an important one.

"Can I get you anything—a glass of wine or a biscuit?" her uncle said.

"No, thanks. Well, if you will, a glass of water, if you can."

He got out, and presently returned with some soda-water, into which he had poured a flavouring of sherry, explaining that there was no water to be had. Beattie drank almost feverishly.

The train stayed only a few minutes. Presently they were spinning along again. The noise of the wheels merged into a kind of sing-song for Beattie, a refrain of "Jessie Rochester." She became quite angry with herself at last for being so childish.

"Uncle, what sort of place is Altenham, where papa lives?" she inquired, to rid herself of tiresome ideas.

"You will see it in an hour's time. I am such a bad hand at description."

"What kind of person is—papa's wife?"

"I tell you I am a dreadfully poor word painter."

"But you can give me a notion."

"She is tall, to begin with, and fat, though she would be frightfully angry if anybody said so. Her hair is—well, really, I hardly know what colour her hair is."

"I don't exactly mean that. I mean, is she nice, kind—I mean—"

"Really I don't know, I have hardly seen her, so to say. But you will see her in such a short time that it is scarcely worth while to say anything about her."

"Well, come, you can surely tell me what this charming young lady is like, this Miss—Miss, what did you say her name was?"

"Oh, ah, yes, to be sure. Well, come my dear niece, I believe you are a modern Fatima. You will be marrying Barbe Bleu. Pasha some day, and then what will become of you, eh?"

"Nonsense, uncle. It always makes me cross when I am laughed at."

"I didn't know you were such a little Bengal tigress. I should say you look awfully handsome when in a downright, thundering rage."

"I shall not talk to you any more. You are very disagreeable and satirical, Uncle Gerald. You won't tell me anything, you will not let me know what anybody or any place is like that I ask about. I wish I had one of those novels I saw at the last station, I should bury myself in it, and never disengage till we reached Altenham."

"You shall have a bundle at the next station. There is no such place on this line as Altenham, my dear, Altenham is the name of your father's house. I will tell you anything you please; it is because I don't know how to describe that I seem so stupid."

"Will you tell me what my father is like? Is he like you?"

"Not a bit, at least not particularly."

"Is he as tall as you? as—"

Beattie blushed crimson. She was going to say, "As handsome as you?" but checked herself in time to avoid a stupidity. Her eyes unconsciously said it, and Gerald Allenby was softened a little by her child-like admiration.

"He is an inch or two taller than I am, he wears a longer beard, he is not quite so dark as I am, but nearly so, and now he stoops slightly. Are you satisfied?"

Beattie shook her head.

"No, I want to know everything."

"An ambitious desire."

"I mean about my home."

"Oh, to be sure, I understand. Your ambition will be easily gratified. I hope you will be happy."

"Do you think there is any doubt?"

"No, certainly not. I don't know how you'll get on with your lady mother, though."

"Why? Now, I asked you, what she was like, and you wouldn't tell me. Do you think she will like me?"

"My dearest niece, how could I possibly tell? I am no soothsayer, I assure you."

"I suppose my father is very fond of her? I thought I should have had him all to myself. I shall not be mistress, after all."

Gerald Allenby did not answer. At every opportunity, he endeavoured to study this girl's character and disposition from the varying expression in her face.

"Has your aunt, then, never told you anything about your father, or the place you are going to?" he asked, presently.

Beattie started. She had fallen into another reverie.

"Not much. She never liked to speak about him, and as she gave me the habit of never making any inquiry about my father from the time I was a child, I rarely asked her."

"Do you know her reason for such odd behaviour?" asked Gerald Allenby, a little surprised.

"No, she never liked either me or Fayette to ask about—about our parents."

The dialogue languished a little after this. At the next station the train stopped, and Gerald Allenby got out, presently returning, loaded with a bundle of five or six railway novels, which he threw on the seat beside his niece.

"Oh, thank you," cried Beattie, her eyes glowing with pleasure. "But I cannot read even one before we reach our journey's end."

"Never mind. You can look over them and see which you like best, and then read any you please afterwards, or throw them away, as may happen to be convenient."

He went away again, but returned in two or three minutes with a small basket of beautiful peaches.

"A fellow here asked me to take them. He is going to start off for London to sell a lot."

These little kindnesses he lightly showed without seeming to expect any particular thanks. The rest of the journey was occupied by Beattie in running over the pages of her books like a bee over a cluster of scented flowers. She was fond of novel reading, but Miss Ibbotson's collection was limited almost exclusively to odd works by novelists fashionable at the beginning of the nineteenth century; tales—some belonging to the famous Minerva Press school, some by Miss Porter, Mackenzie, Mrs. Opie, and other half-forgotten celebrities. If Beattie occasionally obtained some of the modern novels, it was a rare and exceptional treat.

By means of her stories, Beattie found the journey was delightfully shortened. In fact, she uttered a cry of incredulity and surprise when her uncle pronounced very quietly the commonplace yet ever emphatic words:

"Phippborough! Here we are at last!"

In spite of her excitement and impatience, Beattie had lost herself amid her fairy tales of modern life. But she looked up instantly, and gazed around at the prosaic country station as if it were the landing stage of an enchanted region. She could hardly speak. Her eyes were brilliant with emotion and expectancy; her face aglow with mingled hope and undefined misgiving. As they stopped, a slight but vivid flash of lightning, followed by a deep, leonine roar of thunder, greeted the travellers.

"I hope the storm will keep off till we reach home," said Gerald Allenby, in an anxious tone.

Home! How strange it sounded.

"You wanted to see Miss Jessie Rochester," said Mr. Allenby. "There she is."

A mist of red seemed to float before Beattie's eyes.

"Where, uncle?" she eagerly asked, craning out her neck.

"Do you see a tall girl in a dark-blue riding-habit standing just within the door of the waiting-room?" said Gerald Allenby, lazily, a half-smile on his lips.

Beattie did not answer, but stared with all her eyes and photographed the girl on her memory for future reference. The "tall girl" stood idly watching as the train came in. An indescribably handsome girl, who seemed quite comfortably assured of her own beauty and supreme importance.

How rapidly sketch that splendid face and

figure; a perfectly rounded form—that of a young Diana, magnificent black hair, coiled in Greek fashion round a faultless head, a firm, easy carriage, the bearing of an empress. The train stopped. Gerald Allenby jumped out and offered his hand to assist his niece to alight. She gathered up her books, her basket of fruit, and her travelling-bag, and gave them to him, then lightly touched his arm and sprang to the boarded platform.

Gerald Allenby glanced from the tail of his eye at Jessie Rochester, as he smiled at the beautiful young creature with whom he had been travelling. But Miss Rochester did not appear to take any particular interest. She openly watched with undisguised curiosity as they emerged from the carriage, but still stood perfectly quiescent, never stirring one step. As Beattie stepped out a flash of blue forked lightning almost blinded her, and a sudden splash of rain dashed in her face.

"The storm is on us, I am afraid. What a confounded nuisance! I hope the carriage is waiting," said Gerald Allenby. "Come in here and I will see," as he hurried Beattie towards the waiting-room. "Ah!" he added, with well feigned surprise, as if he had not previously seen Miss Rochester, and lifting his hat with an air of delight, "I am—I was going to say surprised to see you here, but—"

"How do you do, Mr. Allenby? You may well be surprised. My horse cast a shoe, and Edwards, my groom, has taken him to the forge, so I thought it best to wait here. Indeed, I had no choice."

As she spoke Miss Rochester stared at Beattie with polite curiosity.

"My niece, Miss Rochester, Sir Hubert Allenby's daughter," said Gerald Allenby. "This is Miss Rochester, Beatrice, my dear; the young lady of whom I was speaking."

The two young ladies smiled sweetly, bowed their heads, and hated one another directly, as is the usual custom with handsome young women when introduced, if they don't take a violent fancy to each other; especially when one is conscious of rivalry, and is stiff and constrained.

Another blue flash, a deep thunderous roar, and a splashing of great raindrops. The young ladies and their escort retreated into the waiting-room. The place began to look dismal. The train drew itself snorting out of the station, the very few people who had alighted or entered the carriages had vanished—even the porters disappeared. Gerald Allenby darted to the railing which separated the platform from the road, and perceived that Sir Hubert's carriage was in waiting.

"Miss Rochester," he said, anxiously, "you will surely not wait here? The storm may last for two or three hours, and it is decidedly going to be something terrible. Let me persuade you to come with us."

"But—but my servant—when he comes back he will wonder what has become of me," objected Jessie, who was, however, trembling with nervous fear of the storm and the sudden chilliness induced by the rain.

Another flash, a deep threatening roar of thunder, as if the roof must give way. Jessie shuddered and turned pale with affright.

"I will leave word with the station-master," urged Gerald Allenby, "and your horse can be taken across to the 'Plough and Harrow' opposite. Besides, I don't think your man could venture to bring them through this storm. Really, Miss Rochester, I think the best thing we can do is to rush across to the place ourselves and wait till the storm is past. I don't believe our horses could go through such rain, and such—such—"

Again the lightning streaked along the platform, followed by an almost instant rattling peal of thunder. The rain began dashing down in a straight black torrent. The storm had been gathering all the time Beattie and Gerald Allenby were on the road, though neither had observed it.

Beattie was not in the least afraid. She stood like a queen, all her grandest "company

manners" on, enjoying the splendour of the storm all the more because her beautiful rival—if she were such—did not like it. Gerald Allenby caught Miss Rochester's hand, and signed to Beattie to follow. Beattie had her books and her fruit in her arms, her uncle carrying her travelling bag.

Gerald hurried the girls the few steps necessary to traverse in order to reach the carriage, by the door of which the immovable footman who had come with it stood, calm as a Pompeian sentry whom an avalanche of lava could not drive an inch beyond his duty. On seeing them this functionary opened the door, and the girls gladly scrambled into shelter.

"Drive across to the 'Plough,' set us down, and then put up the horses and dry yourselves," said Mr. Allenby to the servants as he followed the girls.

It was only across the road, and the frightened horses dashed over a few steps, then drew up. In a moment almost, Mr. Allenby and the two girls, who did nothing but stare at one another, were within the house in a large comfortable coffee-room.

"Come," said Gerald Allenby, smiling, half joyously, "let us make the best of it. 'Tis only a summer storm, and can't last long."

Two handsome young women, newly and unexpectedly introduced to one another, generally feel as pugnaciously disposed as two London street boys anxious to scrape an acquaintance, or two rival cock robins.

Jessie Rochester knew nothing whatever of Miss Allenby, but Beattie could not help thinking of the hints her uncle had thrown out. Beattie eyed her possible rival from head to foot, and could not deny that she was faultless—a lovely Diana, all sparkle and beauty, with an air as if she knew all the world lay at her feet.

Poor Beattie envied her—this darling of the gods. She was like some beautiful, exquisitely finished picture. There was no trace of this common work-a-day world about her, yet she seemed so little self-conscious that it was a pleasure and a privilege only to look at her.

At that moment nobody was farther from Miss Rochester's thoughts than Percy Darvill. But even had she recollected him it would not have occurred to her to imagine that her new friend knew as much as his name. However, she glanced at Beattie a good many times under her long eyelashes, and viewed her with much curiosity, though she rather severely criticised the way she was dressed.

An honest, frank, straightforward girl, handsome enough not to be envious, is mostly generous enough to sincerely admire another girl's beauty. So, after awhile, Beattie and Jessie Rochester began to look at one another more favourably than at first.

Jessie was brave in most respects, though she had a nervous dread of thunder and lightning. Seeing that her two companions regarded the storm with so little concern, she tried to stifle her fear, only uttering a faint, half-strangled squeak when a more than usually vivid flash streaked through the lowered holland blind, or a terrific peal seemed to shake the house to its very foundations.

The flashes by-and-bye became more infrequent, the thunder died away, the rain diminished to a gentle drip-drip, and at last a sudden blaze of sunshine on the window showed that the storm had ceased. Gerald Allenby looked out. A brilliantly clear azure sky, slightly flecked with fleecy clouds, betrayed no signs of the tempest, only the sandy road was thoroughly wet, the heavy branches of the tall trees about were sparkling with ten thousand diamonds.

An hour had elapsed, and by this time the girls were very good friends, laughing and chattering away as if they had been acquainted all their lives. Beattie had not risked mentioning Percy Darvill's name, but she had told Jessie very frankly a great deal about Miss Ibbotson, and Fayette, and twenty other things, for she was little used to the regulation reserve of society, and had nothing of the society tone about her.

Jessie thought her "very jolly," to quote a phrase adopted by herself, and though she smiled slightly at the prattle of home, took it all in a friendly spirit, and reciprocated, mentioning some small details about her own father, and her home affairs generally. Gerald Allenby stood by the window, a benignant smile on his manly countenance.

Feminine prattle is always immensely interesting to a male listener, but the M.L. invariably supposes himself to be laughing in his sleeve. The male listeners, notably of the Gerald Allenby genus, entertain a profound feeling of contempt for the female understanding, and regard the chitter chatter of girls as being about as intelligible and intelligent as the yap yap of a Skye, or the tweet tweet of a canary.

Miss Rochester's groom had brought her horse back to the "Plough and Harrow," but Gerald Allenby earnestly urged her to go to Altenham, instead of riding through the wet roads. A carriage would be placed at her disposal, and she would be much more comfortable. She made every reasonable demur, but at last yielded, much against her own inclination, so the carriage was ordered round, and the interrupted journey was resumed.

Altenham was about an hour's drive from Phippsborough Station. The way was most picturesque and diversified, and showed in full beauty under the rich slanting rays of the golden sunlight, the renewed splendour of the summer's day. To Gerald Allenby the scenery had been familiar from his youth, but to Beattie it presented all the charm of novelty.

It was infinitely more beautiful than the somewhat flat country to which she had been accustomed. It was grander, more varied, more romantic. Even the occasional village inns looked sleepily antique and pictorial. Beattie's eager eyes devoured the panoramic groups as they followed one another.

Gerald Allenby looked at her with surprise. Now a fine "view" opened—anon a quaint church, embowered in rich, luxuriant ivy, half brown, half green. Then some tranquil lane, where the murmuring interlaced branches made an umbrageous archway. Then an out-of-the-way old High Street, with Queen Anne or even Queen Elizabeth houses, and shops where neither buyer nor seller was visible.

Then some park wall, stained by time, shaded by overhanging branches of old fruit trees, or some sloping, wooded grounds, half shrubbery, half garden, or velvety meadows, dotted by groups of sheep and meditative kine. The country was familiar to Jessie Rochester, and her new friend's avowed delight and interest amused her, so she good-naturedly acted as cicerone, by pointing out anything in the slightest degree remarkable. Jessie Rochester possessed the artistic quality in which Gerald Allenby was lacking, and she was also largely sympathetic.

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY ALLENBY'S WELCOME.

ALTHOUGH to some extent sombre in aspect, suggestive of dim rooms, oak-pannelled corridors, and white-robed ghosts, Altenham was a noble, thoroughly "English" old house. Clustered groups of trees almost hid the graceful Elizabethan building, but a glitter of diamond-paned window shone through the leaves in the glorious golden sunlight.

Two persons—a lady and a young man—were waiting in the Tapestry Room. The lady was superbly handsome, if no longer in possession of youth. Her stately figure showed to the utmost advantage in her rich dinner dress of black silk.

The gentleman was, perhaps, about three or four and twenty; fair, with a curiously languid expression and manner. He was lying lazily on a couch, his blue eyes nearly closed, a good-natured smile on his lips.

"Marry and settle down!" he is saying, with a careless laugh—the pleasant, soft laugh of a man who is bored to the last degree, but too good-natured to complain. "Not if I know it."

Jove, you ladies seem never to think of anything but match-making. I had an offer from a young person, aged six, a week ago. How will the feminine half of humanity amuse itself in the dread hereafter, when there is to be no more marrying or giving in marriage—no more sea, erge, no more sea-side flirtation, no more crying—"

"Will you be serious and not try to be ridiculous," says the lady, severely. "Nothing is more irritating than to be met with impertinent levity when you want to discuss an all-important subject."

"Proceed, mia madre. The topic is always an interesting one, more or less. The prisoner at the bar pleads—"

Lady Allenby muttered an impatient interjection, and looked irritably from the window by which she stood. Unfortunately for the success of the object she had in view, she was one of those people who can never meet others on neutral ground, or allow things to take their own course. Lady Allenby was naturally of an intriguing disposition, but strangely wanting in tact.

"I wished to talk to you about your future prospects, and you put me off with folly," she said, peevishly.

"I thought you were talking about a young lady."

"So I was, Eric. It is the same thing. You know that—will you let me, once for all, speak to you of your exact position? You are well aware that I have nothing to give you. My little fortune is sunk in an annuity, and settled on myself. All depends on Sir Hubert. If he sees fit and good to settle a certain income on you—"

"But, please, about the young lady? After all, I think she is the more interesting topic of debate. The invention of money was one of the seven plagues of Egypt, wasn't it? You want me to play the part of Benedick the Married Man. Is Beatrice, the fair and coy, willing and ready?"

"I shall tell you nothing more. You are simply—"

"An irreconcilable. I will tell you the shortest way. Might I be allowed to see the young person first? If she is endurable—I suppose she must have money?—well, I suppose, there is one young person in particular whom you have in view?"

Lady Allenby unfurled her large black fan with an air of dignified displeasure. But a certain expression in her brilliant black eyes admitted that her designs had reference to one already-selected young lady.

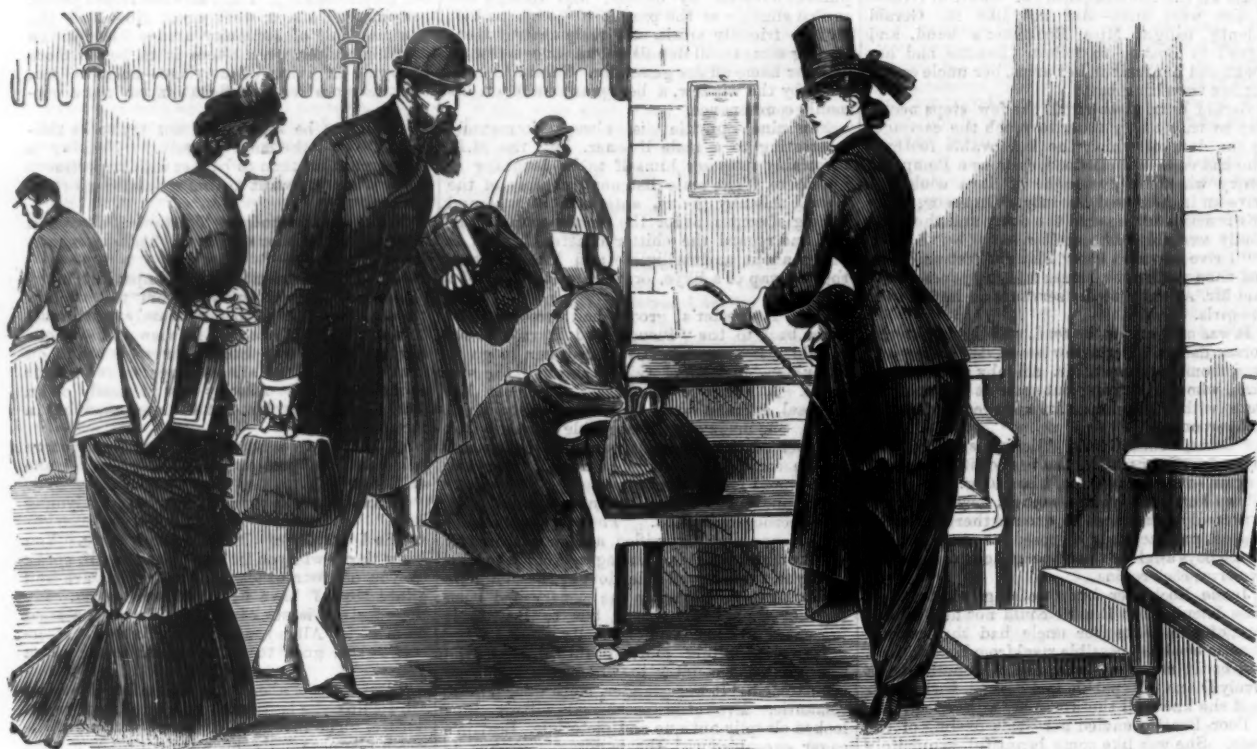
"Of course," lazily continued Eric, "I am perfectly aware that I am superlatively good-looking, and am quite sure that any young female, however handsome, however amiable and well-endowed with this world's goods, would be only too delighted to accept my matrimonial offers. But, no. Second thoughts are always best. I am not for sale. So it doesn't signify."

"Really those people ought to be here by this time," said Lady Allenby, afraid to speak as angrily to her son as her feelings prompted, and thinking it safest to change the subject. "Of course they had to wait for the storm to subside, but they ought to be here now. Already I have ordered dinner to be put off one hour. I wish I had not done so."

"Travellers ought to be satisfied with whatever they can get," remarked Eric, "and not look for lobster soups and salmon cutlets fresh from the spit—though, on second thoughts, I believe cooks don't give you soups and cutlets from the spit. I was really thinking how rejoiced and grateful I ought to feel towards my special guardian angel, who allowed me, or helped me, to arrive within these hospitable walls ere the storm broke."

"I am most thankful you escaped it. But I certainly was surprised to see you. I had no idea you were coming. Hark!" she continued, eagerly looking out. "I hope—I wonder where Sir Hubert is."

"Somewhere about the house," carelessly suggested Eric. "May I be permitted to inquire



[NEW FRIENDS.]

if the young person—I mean your charming stepdaughter—she is charming, is she not?”

“I have never had the pleasure of seeing the young lady,” frigidly replied Lady Allenby.

“Um-well. Charming or—or whatever else she may be—is she the Y. P. you have been contemplating for your unhappy son?”

“No.”

“Short and sweet. If she had been I should have fled with precipitation.”

The rapid echoes of horses’ feet and carriage wheels interrupted him. Lady Allenby, muttering again, “I wonder where Sir Hubert is,” went over to a large piece of looking-glass inserted in a portion of the wall, and gazed attentively at her reflected image. As she sailed back in her stately way to the window the carriage containing Miss Allenby and her two companions came in sight.

Lady Allenby drew back slightly from her post of observation, standing so as to be veiled by the draperies about the windows, but still looked out inquisitively. She had the eyes of a mountain eagle, and the hood of the carriage was thrown back, so that she could easily distinguish the occupants. Eric lazily watched her face, as if it were a mirror, and saw enough therein to induce him to raise himself and finally walk over and station himself immediately behind her motionless figure.

“Jove—two girls! Two deucedly handsome young women, too,” he meditatively said, pretending to shade his eyes with his hand. “Which in which, and who is who, mia madre?”

“The one in the riding habit is—but I shall not gratify your idle curiosity. You don’t deserve it.”

“And wherefore not? What have I done? The one in the big straw hat—who is she, then?”

“Miss Allenby, I presume. I wonder where her father is?”

That gentleman answered the question by quietly walking into the room as she spoke.

A tall man, looking much older than he really was, with a slight stoop, and a languid, pre-

occupied air. A dark brown beard rippled over his breast, and gave him a distinguished aspect. A careworn, anxious look contracted his otherwise pleasant, handsome face, though he had been, since the death of his father, some three or four months ago now, free from the petty worry that had hitherto taken the light from his life.

“My lady mother was going to get up an exploring party in search of you, sir,” said Eric, who was as sunlight unto shade in his airy demeanour and smiling manner.

“Ah, indeed,” replied Sir Hubert, absently, as if thinking of some subject a hundred miles away; “you seem very much interested, you and madame.”

“The sole daughter of your house and home is just making a triumphal entry into her paternal halls, sir, and I couldn’t help looking to see what she was like. Fearfully rude, you know, and against all the conventionalities, but I couldn’t help it. Curiosity was the first sin introduced into the world, you know, sir—”

“Quite natural, I suppose. Do not apologise; it is quite unnecessary.”

Sir Hubert went over and looked out himself, but the carriage drive turned off after a certain point, and the carriage had disappeared. Lady Allenby sank into an easy-chair and arranged her draperies with an eye to statuesque effect. Eric sauntered to one of the oblong pieces of glass set in the panelling, and stroked down his spotless shirt front and the quilted lapels of his coat.

Sir Hubert stood leaning almost moodily against the centre of the room. Not another word was spoken by any of the three. They waited until a servant opened the door. He approached and spoke a few words to Lady Allenby, in almost an inaudible tone.

“Oh, nonsense,” said Lady Allenby, aloud, “it does not signify. Let them all come here. Of course, there is every excuse for travellers. Request Mr. Gerald Allenby to bring the young ladies here.”

The powdered head bowed and vanished.

“What is it?” asked Sir Hubert, rousing himself.

“Oh, they don’t like presenting themselves all travel-stained and way-worn, that is all,” answered Lady Allenby.

In a few moments the powdered head reappeared to announce, pompously:

“Miss Allenby, Miss Rochester, and Mr. Allenby.”

Beattie was put forward by her uncle, and stood irresolutely on the furry white rug just inside the sombre old door. She looked at Lady Allenby first, the most prominent person there, then at Eric, who was staring at her with all his eyes, and lastly at the tall, sad figure by the table.

“My child,” said Sir Hubert, advancing.

She made a little dash and threw herself excitedly into his arms. For a moment or two there was silence, broken now by the voice of Lady Allenby, who advanced eagerly to Miss Rochester.

“My dearest, dearest child, what an unexpected pleasure; I am delighted.”

She kissed Miss Rochester affectionately, almost effusively, and asked her twenty questions in a breath. Then she turned to Gerald Allenby.

“Oh, a thousand pardons, I did not notice you. But of course you are one of the family.”

Gerald muttered something under his beard, but the expression in his face was decidedly not that of gratification. He glanced at Eric, and his countenance fell several degrees more. Sir Hubert advanced close to his wife, leading Beattie by the hand.

“My daughter,” he said. “Beattie, this is—my wife,” he concluded, awkwardly.

Somehow he could not say “your mother,” as he had intended. Lady Allenby looked Beattie steadily in the face, but held out her hand kindly enough. She had a very unpleasant way of flickering her splendid black eyelashes up and down like a mimic fan that made the person she gazed at feel uncomfortable.

(To be Continued.)



[A LAST FAREWELL.]

A BRIDE WELL WON.

(A COMPLETE STORY.)

CHAPTER I.

THE small but fashionable town of Lago, usually so tranquil, was thronged with a happy, joyous crowd, repairing on foot and in every kind of vehicle to the cathedral of San Mazzaro, which was situated at the extreme verge of Monza, beside the sparkling waters of the Lagune.

It was the eve of St. Mary, a day set aside from time immemorial for a great and peculiar festival. All, accordingly, was life and joy. The marriages of a goodly company of the high-born, the young, and the beautiful were to be celebrated on this occasion, and in public, according to custom.

Headed by the cardinal himself, the city sent forth its thousands. The ornamented gondolas plied busily from an early hour in the morning from the city to Lago, and there, amidst music and the merry congratulations of friends, the lovers disembarked. They were all dressed in their richest apparel; silks which caught their hues from the rainbow, and jewels that had inherited their beauty from the sun and stars, met the eye at every turn. All that could delight the eye was displayed to the eager gaze of curiosity.

But gorgeous and grand as was the spectacle, and joyous as was the crowd, there were some young, throbbing hearts, who, though deeply interested in the proceedings, felt anything but gladness, while most of the betrothed thrilled only with rapturous anticipations. Yet there were others who felt only that sad sinking of the heart which declares nothing but its hopelessness.

As the fair procession moved onward through the gorgeous avenues of the cathedral to the altar, where stood the venerable cardinal waiting

to begin the solemn but grateful rites, one might have noticed in the crowded aisle the pallid cheek, the tearful eye, and the tremulously convulsed lip of one of the meek brides, which declared a heart very far removed from joyful expectation.

It was Isabel Courtney, the beautiful daughter of Colonel Edward Courtney, who, at the express wish of his lovely wife, a native of the sunny south, left England for Italy soon after the birth of Isabel, where he had ever since resided.

But where is the bride's anticipated joy? It is not in the despairing vacancy of that beautiful face—not in the faltering, almost fainting footsteps—not, certainly, in anything that we behold about the maiden, unless we seek it in the rich and costly jewels with which she is adorned, and these no more declare her emotions than the roses which encircle the neck of the lamb as it is led to the altar for the sacrifice.

The fate of the two is not unlike, nor, also, is their character. Isabel Courtney is decreed for a sacrifice. She was one of those sweet and winning creatures which know how to submit only. She had no power of resistance; she knows that she is a victim; she feels that her heart has been wronged even to the death; she feels that she is made the cruel but willing instrument for doing a mortal wrong to the heart of another.

Yet she lacks the courage to refuse—to die rather than submit, and this is the language of the woe-begone, despairing glances which she bestows in passing up the aisle upon one who stands beside a marble column, upon whose countenance she perceives a terrible struggle, marking equally his indignation and his grief.

Captain Percy Villiers was the younger son of a noble English family. At the battle of Alma he had won both distinction and many wounds—was invalided home, and ordered by his physician to Italy for the re-establishment of his failing health.

It was at Varese, while vegetating on half

pay, that he met Isabel. Her soft witching beauty won his generous heart at first sight. He sought an early opportunity of avowing his passion to the fair girl, and was rendered supremely happy on learning from her sweet lips that his love was reciprocated. But nobleness without wealth, as we know, is not always the credential in behalf of him who seeks a maiden from her parents. He certainly was not the choice of Isabel's haughty father.

The poor girl was doomed to the embraces of one Ulric Grimani, a man totally destitute of all nobility save that which belongs to wealth. This shone in the eyes of Isabel's parents, but failed utterly to attract her own. She saw, through the heart's simple, unsophisticated medium, the person of Percy Villiers only. Her sighs were given to the young Englishman; her loathings to the Italian.

Though meek and finally submissive, she did not yield without a remonstrance, without mingled tears and entreaties, which were found unavailing. The ally of a young girl is naturally her mother, and when she fails her, her best human hope is lost.

Alas for poor Isabel! It was her mother's weakness, blinded by the wealth of Ulric Grimani, that rendered the colonel's will so stubborn; it was the erring mother that wilfully led her daughter to the sacrifice, giving no heed to the heart which was breaking even beneath its weight of jewels.

How completely that mournful, that entreating glance to her deeply injured lover told her wretched story. There he stood stern and sad, leaning, as if for support, upon the arm of his friend, Lelio Trivulo.

Hopeless, helpless, and in utter despair, he thus lingered, as if under a strange and fearful fascination, watching the progress of the proceedings which were striking fatally with every movement upon the sources of his own hope and happiness. His resolution rose with his desperation, and he suddenly shook himself free from his friend.

"I will not bear this, Lelio!" he exclaimed, passionately. "I will not suffer it to proceed without another effort, though it be the last!"

"What would you do, Percy?" demanded his companion, grasping him by the wrist as he spoke.

"Shall I see her thus sacrificed?" hissed Villiers, vehemently—"delivered to misery and the grave! Never! They shall not as lord it over true affection to her loss and mine. Isabel was mine—is mine even now in the sight of Heaven. How often has she vowed it; her glance vows it now. My lips shall as boldly declare it again, and as Heaven has heard our vows, the church shall hear them—the priest shall hear them; hearts must not be wronged, vows not thus ruthlessly broken. That selfish, vain woman, her mother; that mercenary monster, misnamed her father, have no better rights than mine—none half so good. They shall hear me. Stand by me, Lelio, while I speak."

This was the language of a passion which, however true, was equally unmeasured and imprudent. The friend of the unhappy lover would have held him back.

"It is in vain, Percy. Think, my friend, you can do nothing now; it is too late. Nor is there any power to prevent this consummation. Their names have been long since entered in the Holy Book, and the priest himself cannot alter their destiny."

"Tis useless to press me thus," exclaimed Villiers, as he again attempted to start forward, "I will make one more effort to regain my fleeing happiness."

His companion held him back.

"'Twill be better that we leave this place, Percy," he said. "It was wrong of you to come. Let us go at once; you will only commit some folly which you may hereafter regret."

"Ay, it is folly to be wronged, and to submit to it," Percy said, bitterly; "folly to have felt and still to feel; folly, surely, to discover and to live after the discovery that the very crown that made life precious is lost to you for ever. What matter if I should commit this folly. Well, indeed, 'if they who laugh at the fool taste none of the wrath that they provoke.'"

"This is sheer madness, Percy," said Lelio.

"Release me, Lelio!" cried Villiers.

This dialogue, which was carried on in an undertone, now enforced by animated action, began to attract attention. The procession was moving forward; the high anthem began to swell, and Percy, wrought to the highest pitch of frenzy, now broke away from all restraint and hurried through the crowd.

The young Englishman, frantic with despair, made his way to the altar. The crowd gave way at his approach; they knew his mournful history, for when does the story of love's denial and defeat fail to find its way to the world's curious hearing?

The fate of the youthful lovers drew all eyes upon the two. A fearful interest began to pervade the assembly, and Percy really found no difficulty as would have attended the efforts of any other person to approach the sacred centre of the bridal circle.

He made his way directly to the spot where Isabel stood. She felt his approach by the most natural instinct, though without ever daring to lift her eye to his person. A more deadly paleness than ever overspread her lovely features, and as she heard the first sounds of his voice she faltered and grasped the rail of the altar for support.

Meanwhile, the parents and relatives of Isabel had gathered around the unhappy bride as if to guard her from an enemy, Ulric Grimani, the millionaire, assumed the aspect of a man whose word was law.

He, too, had his friends and relations, all looking daggers at the bold young Englishman. Their looks of wrath, however, did not discourage the approach of our hero; he did not seem, indeed, to see them, but gently putting them aside, he drew near to the scarcely conscious girl.

He lifted the almost lifeless hand from her side and pressed it within his own, a proceeding which her mother vainly endeavoured to prevent. He then addressed Isabel with all that intensity of tone which declares a stifled but passionate emotion of the heart. His words were of pathetic tenderness and touching sorrow.

"And is it thus, my Isabel, that I must look upon you for the last time? Are we henceforth to be dead to each other? Is it thus that I am to hear that, forgetful of your sacred vows to me, you are here calling Heaven to witness that you give yourself and affection to another?"

"Not willingly—oh, not willingly, dear Percy. As I live I have not forgotten. Alas! I cannot forget that I have once vowed myself to thee, but I pray you now to forget, Percy—forget me and forgive—forgive!"

Oh! how mournfully was the response delivered. There was a dead silence through the assembly; a silence which imposed a similar restraint even upon the parents of the young girl, who had shown a desire to arrest the speaker. It was with increased faltering that the unhappy Isabel thus responded to her lover. Her words were little more than whispers, and his tones, though deep, were very low and subdued.

There was that in the scene which brought forward the crowd in breathless anxiety to hear, and the proud heart of Isabel's mother revolted at an exhibition in which her position was by no means a grateful one. She would have wrenched even by violence the hand of her daughter from the grasp of Villiers, but he retained it firmly, the maiden herself being scarcely conscious that he did so. His eye was firmly fixed upon Mrs. Courtney as he drew Isabel towards him; his words followed his looks:

"Have you not enough triumph, madame, in thus bringing about your cruel purpose, the sacrifice of two hearts—your child's as well as mine? Mine was nothing to you, but Isabel's, what has she done that you should trample on hers? This is what you have done—you have succeeded in your wicked purpose. What more do you require? Must she be denied the mournful privilege of saying her last parting with him to whom she vowed herself before high Heaven ere she gives herself to another? For shame, madame; this is a twofold and needless tyranny!"

As he spoke the more gentle and sympathising spirits around looked upon the stern mother with faces of the keenest rebuke and indignation. Percy once more addressed himself to the young girl.

"And if you do not love this man, my Isabel, why is it that you so meekly yield to his solicitations? Why submit to this sacrifice? Have they strength to subdue you—has he the art to ensnare you? Can you not declare your affection with a will? What power is that they employ which is thus superior to that of love? And what is your right—if heedless of the affections of your heart—to demand the sacrifice of mine? You had it in your keeping, Isabel, as I fondly fancied I had thine!"

"You still have, Percy—you still have," gasped the anguish-stricken girl.

"Isabel, my child!" was the expostulating exclamation of Mrs. Courtney, but it failed to arrest the passionate answer of her daughter.

"Hear and pity me, Percy, if you will not forgive me. Blame me not for my infirmity—for the culpable weakness which has brought me to this defeat of my heart, this desolation of mine, but do not doubt that I have loved you—ay, dearly loved you—that I shall ever—"

"Peace!" commanded the imperious priest.

"Speak on, Isabel," Percy cried, enraptured by her words. "What would you say?"

"Take heed," warningly muttered Mrs. Courtney.

The poor girl shrank back with fear and trembling. The brief impulse of courage which the address of her lover and the evident sympathy of the crowd had imparted was gone as suddenly as it came; and, as she sunk back nerveless

under the menacing glances of her parents, Percy dropped her hand from his grasp in hopeless despair. It now lay lifeless at her side, and she was prevented from falling by some of her sympathising companions. The eyes of the young officer were bent upon her with a last look.

"It is all over, then," he exclaimed, hoarsely. "Thy hope, unhappy girl, like mine, must perish, because of your weakness. Yet there will be bitter memories for this," and his eyes, with a severe glance, now sought the mother, "bitter, bitter memories. Isabel, my best beloved, farewell; be happy if you can!"

The young girl rushed towards him as he moved away, recovering all her strength for this one effort. A single and broken sentence—"Forgive me! Oh, forgive!"—escaped her as she sank senseless upon the floor. Percy would have raised her but her people would not permit him.

"Is this not enough, Percy?" said his friend, reproachfully. "Do you not see that your presence but distracts her?"

"You are right, Lelio," said Percy, with intense emotion. "I myself am creaking—let us depart," he gasped, hurrying towards the door.

The organ rolled its anthem, a thousand voices joined in the hymn of praise; and, as the sweet but painful sounds rushed to the senses of Villiers, he darted through the crowd, closely followed by his friend. The grand, joyous music seemed to pursue him with mockery.

He rushed headlong from the building as if seeking escape from some suffocating atmosphere into the pure air of Heaven. The moment of his disappearance was marked by the partial recovery of Isabel, she unloosed her eyes, raised her head and looked wildly around her. Her lips once more murmured his name: "Percy!"

"He is gone," was the sympathising answer from more than one gentle lip; and Isabel, with a heartrending shriek, once more relapsed into unconsciousness.

Percy Villiers was scarcely more conscious than Isabel when he left the cathedral. He needed all the guidance of his friend.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Lelio Trivulo.

"What matter? Which direction you please," was the reply.

"For Milan, then."

And his friend conducted him to the gondola which was awaiting them. In the profoundest silence they glided along the smooth waters of the lake towards the city. The gondola stopped before the villa of Lelio, and taking the arm of the mute and preoccupied Villiers within his own, he ascended the marble steps, and was about to enter an avenue of magnificent chestnuts which led to his dwelling when a shrill voice suddenly attracted their attention.

"Hew now, signor," said the owner of the voice. "Wherefore hast thou left Monza? Why did you not wait the bridal?"

The speaker was a strange, dark-complexioned woman, with massive gold earrings, and dressed in coarse woollen garments. She hobbled along, assisted by a crooked staff, and seemed to suffer equally from lameness and age. Her thin, depressed lips sunk as she spoke into the cavity of the month, which, in the process of time, had been denuded of nearly all its teeth.

A yellow, wrinkled visage, and thin grey hairs, that escaped from the scarlet hood which covered her head, declared the presence of great age. But her eye shone still with something even more animated and impressive than a youthful fire. Nothing, indeed, could be more brilliant, or seemingly more unnatural.

She was known in Milan as the "Spanish gypsy," and her whole life was characterised by mystery. Had she lived at the commencement of the foregoing century she would have been burnt as a sorceress.

However, she was known as an enchantress—a prophetess—and her palmistry, her signs, and talismans, were all held in great repute by the superstitious and the youthful of the ocean city.

Percy Villiers himself, at the pressing instigation of his friend Lelio, obeying the popular custom, had consulted her, and now, as he heard her voice, he started and advanced towards her. She awaited his coming with a significant smile as she repeated her question:

"Why are you not at Monza?"

He answered her inquiry by grasping her wrist violently as he spoke.

"Base impostor! False prophetess! Where is thy boasted skill? Did you not promise me that Isabel Courtney should wed with me—that she should be mine—mine only?"

"Well!" answered the old gipsy, calmly, without seeking to extricate her arm from the strong grip of the young Englishman.

"Well! And even now the rites are in progress which bind her for ever to Ulric Grimani," cried Percy, with withering scorn.

"She will never wed Ulric Grimani," was the quiet reply. "Again, I say, why did you leave Monza?"

"Could I remain and look upon those hated nuptials? Could I be patient and see her driven like a sheep to the sacrifice? I fled from the spectacle as if the knife of the butcher were already in my own heart."

"You were wrong," spoke the gipsy; "but the fates have spoken, and their decrees are unchangeable. I tell you I have seen your bridal with Isabel Courtney. Your alone will interchange with her the final vows before the man of God."

"You are mocking me," said Percy, incredulously.

"I am not in the habit of jesting," returned the Sybil, sternly, seeing that her powers were doubted; "but hasten, that this may find easy consummation. I have also seen other things. Hasten! danger threatens the old cathedral of San Mazzaro and all within its walls. Gather your friends, put on the weapons of war, and fly thither with all speed. I see a terrible vision. Even now I behold terrors that frighten even me. Your friend is a man of courage. Let your gondolas be put forth, and bid them steer for the lake of Monza. There you will win Isabel, and henceforth shall you wear her—you only—so long as it may be allowed you to possess any human joy."

Her voice, look, manner, sudden energy, and the wild fire of her eyes, dispelled in an instant all Percy Villiers' doubts, unsuspicious though he was, and awakened him to his fullest consciousness. His friend drew near, and they would have conferred together, but the gipsy interrupted them.

"You would deliberate," she said, "but you have no time. What is to be done must be done without delay. It seems wild, strange, and idle to an Englishman, doubtless, but if you heed me not, Signor Villiers, bitter will be your repentance hereafter. Away, if you can, but gather a few friends. The time is short, but you will not be too late to save her if you go at once. I hear a fearful cry—the cry of women—and the feeble shriek of Isabel Courtney is among the voices of those who walk with a new terror. I see their struggling forms and floating garments and dishevelled hair. Fly, young signors, lest ye be too late!"

The reputation of the sybil was too great in Milan to allow her wild predictions to be laughed at. Besides, Percy, as well as his Italian friend, Lelio, were both aroused, and eagerly excited by her speech.

Her whole form dilated as she spoke, her voice seemed to come up from an impenetrable depth, and went thrillingly deep into the very souls of her hearers. They were carried away by the passionate eloquence of her predictions.

Soon they had gathered their friends together and turned the prows of their gondolas at once towards Lago, whither the gipsy had directed them. She, meanwhile, had disappeared, but the course of her gondola lay for Monza.

In order to explain how the gipsy became possessed of her knowledge concerning the fate of

Isabel and the danger that menaced her, it is necessary that we should narrate a circumstance which occurred a week previous to the commencement of our story.

The sybil dwelt in an old moss-grown, dilapidated hut, situated in a lonely, picturesque spot at the entrance of a steep and narrow ravine, in the unfrequented wilds of Varese. Let us penetrate the dim and lonesome abode where the Spanish gipsy delivered her predictions.

It is midnight, and still she sits over her incantations. There are vessels of uncouth shape and unknown character before her. Huge braziers lie convenient, on one of which, amidst a few coals, a feeble flame may be seen to struggle.

The atmosphere is impregnated with a strong but not ungrateful perfume, and through its vapours objects appear with some indistinctness. A circular plate of brass or copper rests beneath the finger of the sybil. It is covered with strange and mystic characters, which she seems busily to explore as if they had a real significance in her mind.

But our purpose is not now to determine her pretensions. We have but to exhibit and ascertain a small specimen of her skill in the vulgar business of fortune-telling. Our gipsy expects a visitor; she hears his footstep. The door opens at her bidding, and a stranger makes his appearance.

He is a tall and well-made man of stern and gloomy countenance, which is half concealed by the broad brim of his calabrese-looking hat, and the raised foldings of his cloak. His beard, of enormous length, is seen to stream down upon his breast; but his cheek is youthful, and his eye is eagerly and anxiously bright. But for a certain repelling something in his glance he might be considered very handsome. He advanced with an air of dignity and power. His deportment, his manner and voice all seemed to denote a person accustomed to command.

The gipsy did not look up as he approached; on the contrary, she seemed more intent than ever in the examination of the strange characters before her. But a curious spectator might have seen that a corner of her eye, bright with an intelligence that looked more like cunning than wisdom, was suffered to take in all of the face and person of the visitor that his muffling costume permitted to be seen.

"Mother," said the stranger, "I am here."

"You say not who you are," answered the woman.

"Nor shall say," was the abrupt reply of the stranger. "That, you said, was unnecessary to your art—to the solution of the questions that I asked you."

"Surely," was the answer. "My art, that promises to tell you of the future, would be a sorry fraud could it not declare the present—could it not say who thou art as well as what thou seekest."

"Ha! I'm discovered," exclaimed the other, his hand suddenly feeling within the fold of his cloak as he spoke, as if for a weapon, while his eye glared quickly around the apartment, as if seeking for a secret enemy.

"Nay, fear nothing," said the woman, calmly. "I care not to know who you are. It is not an object of my quest, otherwise it would not long remain a mystery to me."

"It is well; mine is a name that must not be spoken among the homes of Italy. It would make you yourself to quail could you but hear it spoken."

"Perhaps; but mine is not the heart to quail at many things, unless it be the absolute wrath of Heaven. What the violence or the hate of man could do to this feeble frame short of death it has already suffered. You know but little of human cruelty, young man, though thy own deeds be cruel."

"How know you that my deeds are cruel?" was the quick and passionate demand, while the form of the stranger suddenly and threateningly advanced.

The woman was unmoved.

"Didst thou not say that thine was a name that might not be spoken in the homes of Italy?"

Why should thy very name make the hearts of Italy to quail unless for thy deeds of cruelty and crime? But I see further—I see it in thine eyes that thou art cruel. I hear it in thy voice that thou art criminal. I know, even now, that thy soul is bent on deeds of violence, and the very quest that brings thee to me now is less the quest of love than that of wild and selfish passion, which so frequently puts on his habit."

"Ha! speak to me of that! This damsel, Isabel Courtney, 'tis of her that I would have thee speak. You said that she should be mine, yet, lo! her name is written in the Holy Book and she is allotted to this man of wealth, this Ulric Grimani."

"She will never be the wife of Ulric Grimani."

"You said she should be mine."

"Nay, I said not that."

"Ha! 'Tis false."

"No, anger me not, young man. I am slower, much slower to anger than yourself—slower than most of those who still chafe within this mortal covering, yet I am mortal—like yourself—and not wholly free from such foolish passions as vex mortality. Chafe me and I will repulse thee with scorn. Annoy me and I will close upon thee the book of fate, leaving thee to the blind paths which thy passions have ever moved thee to take."

The stranger muttered something apologetically.

"Make me no excuses. I only ask thee to forbear and submit. I said not that Isabel Courtney should be thine. I said only that I behold her in thy arms."

"And what more do I ask?" was the exulting speech of the stranger, his voice rising into a sort of outburst which fully declared the ruffian and the sort of passions by which he was governed.

"If that contents thee, well!" said the sybil, coldly, her eye perusing with a seeming calmness the brazen plate upon which the strange characters were inscribed.

"That, then, you promise me still?" demanded the stranger.

"Thou shalt see for thyself," was the reply.

Thus speaking, the woman slowly arose, and brought forth a small chafing-dish also of brass or copper, not much larger than a common plate. This she placed over the brazier, the flame of which she quickened by a few small puffs from a pair of small bellows.

As the flame kindled and the sharp, red jets rose like tongues on either side of the plate, she poured into it something like a gill of a thick, tenacious liquid. Above this she brooded for a while with her eyes immediately over the vessel; and the keen ear of the stranger, quickened by excited curiosity, could detect the muttering of her lips, though the foreign syllables which she employed were entirely beyond his comprehension.

Suddenly a thick vapour went up from the dish. She withdrew it from the brazier and laid it before her on a table. A few moments sufficed to clear the surface of the vessel, the vapour arising and hanging languidly above her head.

"Look now for thyself and see," was her command to the visitor, she herself not deigning a glance upon the vessel, seeming thus to be quite sure of what it would present, or quite indifferent to the result.

The stranger needed no second summons. He bent instantly over the vessel, and started back with undisguised surprise.

"It is she!" he exclaimed. "She droops. Whose arm is it that supports her? Upon whose breast is it that she lies? Who bears her away in triumph?"

"Is it not thyself?" asked the sybil, coldly.

"By St. Mark, it is! She is mine! she is in my arms. I have her in in my gondola; she speeds with me to my mountain home. I see it all, even as thou hast promised me."

"I promised thee nothing. I but show thee what is written."

"But when will this be?" eagerly asked the stranger.

"It must be ere she marries with Ulric Grimalani."

"And it is appointed that he weds with her on the eve of St. Mary, which is but a week from hence, and the ceremony takes place at—"

"At Monza," said the gipsy, finishing the sentence.

"Ha, at Monza," and a bright gleam of intelligence passed over the features of the stranger, from which his cloak had fallen.

The gipsy beheld the look, and a scornful smile played for a moment about her sunken lips.

"Mother," said the stranger, "must all these matters be left to fate?"

"That is as thou wilt," said the old gipsy.

"But the eye of a young girl may be won, her heart may be touched, so that it shall be easy for fate to accomplish her designs. I am young, am tolerably well-fashioned in person, have but little reason to be ashamed of the face which Heaven has given me. Besides, I have much skill in music, and can sing to the mandoline as fairly as most of the young men of Italy. What if I were to find my way to the damsel? What if I play and sing beneath her father's palace? I have disguises, and am wont to practice in various garments. I can—"

The sybil interrupted him.

"Thou canst do as thou wilt. Thou hast seen what I have shown, I am not permitted to counsel thee. I am but a voice; thou hast all that I can give thee."

The stranger lingered still; but the woman ceased to speak, and betrayed by her manner that she desired his departure. Seeing this, he took a purse from his bosom and laid it before her. She did not seem to notice the action, nor did she again look up until he was gone.

With the sound of his retreating footsteps, she put aside the brazen volume of strange characters which seemed her favourite study, and her lips slowly moved in soliloquy.

"Ay, thou exultest, fierce ruffian that thou art, in the assurance that fate yields herself to thy will. Thou shalt, indeed, have the maiden in thy arms, but it shall profit thee nothing; and that single triumph shall exact from thee the last penalties which are sure to follow on the footsteps of a sinful calling like thine. Thou thinkest that I know thee not, as if thy shallow masking could baffle eyes and art like mine. Thou callous leader of a band of robbers; but I had not shown thee thus much were I not in possession of yet further knowledge—did I not see that this lure was essential to embolden thee to thy final overthrow."

She paused awhile.

"Alas!" she resumed, "that in serving the cause of innocence, in saving the innocent from harm, we cannot be certain of securing their happiness. Poor Isabel, beloved by three, yet blessed with neither. Thou shalt be wedded, yet be no bride; shalt gain all that thy fond young heart craves for, yet gain nothing; be spared the embraces of him thou loapest, yet rest in the arms of him whom thou hast most need to fear, and shall be denied, even when most assured, the only embrace which might bring thee joy."

The sybil ceased speaking, seated herself upon a low stool, buried her face in her hands as though in deep thought, and thus remained. But let us leave the abode of mystery—let us once more change the scene.

Now pass we to the brigand's haunt in the mountains of Locarno, a region over which the control of the Government was exceedingly feeble and capricious, and subject to frequent vicissitudes.

At the time of which we write—only a few years back—it was the refuge of the fiercest band of brigands that ever infested the country between Monza and the Appennines, and was headed by the famous but terrible chief, Ill Passotore—the disguised stranger of whom we have just spoken.

reached the secret stronghold of his band in the heart of the mountains. Pushing aside a dense mass of flowery creepers which grew down the face of the precipice, he passed through an aperture which the foliage hid, into a passage cut in the solid rock, which terminated in a number of natural caves, in the largest of which the band was holding high revel. Captain Passotore entered, unobserved, a small cavern, fitted up with some pretensions to luxury, and throwing himself upon a couch he prepared rather to rest his limbs than to sleep.

He had thoughts to keep him wakeful; wild hopes, and tenderer joys than his usual occupation offered, were gleaming before his fancy. The light suspended from the rocky ceiling burned dimly, but the shapes of his imagination rose up before his mind's eye not the less vividly because of the obscurity in which he lay. Thus musing over expectations of a most agreeable and pleasant nature he finally drifted into the land of dreams. He was suddenly aroused from slumber by no gentle hand.

"Who is it?" he asked of the intruder.

"Carlo," was the answer.

"You, brother!"

"Ay!" continued the intruder, "and here are all of us."

"Indeed, and wherefore come you," said the brigand chief. "I would sleep—I am weary, I must have rest."

"You have had too much rest, Ill," said another of the brothers. "It is that of which we complain, that of which we would speak to you, now."

"Ah! This is new language!" exclaimed Ill Passotore, darting up. "Brothers, answer me, perhaps I am not well awake, am I your captain or not?"

"You are, the fact seems to be forgotten by no one but yourself; though the youngest of our mother's children we made thee our leader."

"For what did you this, brothers, unless that I might command ye?"

"For this in truth, and this only, did we confer upon thee this authority. You have shown yourself worthy to command. Thy skill—thy courage—thy—"

"In brief, you thought me the best fitted to command you."

"We did?"

"Then I command ye hence, leave me and let me rest."

"Nay, brother, but this cannot be," was the reply of another. "We must speak with thee while the night serves us lest you hear worse things with the morrow. Thou art, indeed, our captain; chosen because of your qualities of service, to conduct and counsel us; but we chose thee not that you should sleep, you were chosen that our enterprises might be active, and might lead to frequent profit."

"Has it not been so?" demanded the chief.

"For a season it was so, and there was no complaint of thee."

"Who now complains?"

"The band—all."

"And can you not answer them?"

"No, for we ourselves need an answer. We, too, complain."

"Of what do you complain?"

"That our enterprises profit us nothing."

"And why is that?"

"Because of the want of our captain."

"And can you do nothing without me. Is it because you are incapable that I must have no leisure for myself?"

"Nay, something more than this, brother. Our enterprises avail us nothing since you command that we no longer trouble the wealthy people of Monza. Monza has become thy favourite; for this we complain of thee, for this thy followers complain of thee; they are impoverished by thy new born love for Monza, when it is her merchants alone who should give us spoil: this is thy true offence. Brother, their purpose is to depose thee."

"Ha! and ye—"

"We are men, as well as brethren. We cherish no such attachment for Monza as that which

seems to fill thy bosom. When the question will be taken in regard to thy office, our voices shall be against you, unless—"

There was a pause. It was broken by the chief.

"Well, speak out, what are your conditions?"

"Listen to us, brother. You know of the annual festival at Monza when the marriage takes place of all those maidens whose families are favourites of the signiory."

The eyes of the brigand chief involuntarily closed at the suggestion, but he nodded his head affirmatively. The speaker continued:

"It is now but a week when this festival takes place. On this occasion assemble the great, the noble, and the wealthy of the city. Thither they bring all that is gorgeous in their apparel, all that is precious among their jewels and ornaments; here, too, is the beauty of the city. Could there be a prize more easy of attainment? The cathedral of San Mazzaro permits no armed men within its Holy sanctuaries. There are no apprehensions of peril, the people can offer no defence against our attack. What place more lonely than Lago? Thither shall we repair the day before the festival, and shelter ourselves from scrutiny. At the moment when the crowd is greatest, we will dart upon our prey. We lack wives; we desire wealth; shall we fail in either? These Milan beauties shall become ours. Thou, too, if the gossip of thy followers do thee no injustice, hast become enamoured of one of these. She will doubtless be present at this festival; make her thine, and fear not that each of thy brethren will do justice to his tastes and thine own. Here, now, you have heard all. Either agree to what the band demand, or the power departs from thy keeping."

There was a pause. At length Ill Passotore addressed his brothers.

"You have spoken; you threaten too. This power of which you speak is precious in your eyes, but I value it not, and were you to depose me to-morrow I should be your master in another month did it please me to command a people so capricious. I but speak thus to show you that I fear you not. I will do as you desire; but did not your own wishes fit evenly with mine I would bide the issue of this struggle, be what it might."

"It matters not how you feel, brother, so that thou dost as we demand. Will you lead us to this spoil?"

"I will."

"It is enough. It will prove to thy followers that they are still masters of the mountains."

"Leave me now."

The brothers took their departure. When they had gone Ill Passotore mused thus:

"Per Bacco! there is the hand of fate in this. Methinks I see the history once more, even as I beheld it in the magic mirror of the Spanish sybil. Why did I not think of this before? Dreaming like a stupid boy, as much in love with his music as himself, who hopes by the tinkle of his guitar to win his beauty from the palace of her noble sire to the obscure retreats of his mountain home. These brethren of mine shall not vex me: they are but the creatures of my destiny."

CHAPTER II.

LET US NOW return to the Cathedral of San Mazzaro, and resume the progress of the strangely mingled ceremony which was broken by the passionate conduct of Percy Villiers. We left poor crushed Isabel in a state of unconsciousness in the arms of her sympathising friends.

For a brief space the impression was a painful one upon the hearts of the assembly; but as the deep notes of the organ rolled its ascending anthems the emotion subsided. The people had assembled for pleasure, for an amusing spectacle, and though sympathising for a moment with the pathetic fortunes of the sundered lovers, they were not to be disappointed in the objects for which they came.

It was midnight when Captain Passotore

The various shows of the assemblage, the dresses, the jewels, the dignitaries, and the beauties, were quite enough to divert the feelings of a populace at all times notorious for its levities from a scene which, however impressive at first, was becoming a little tedious.

Our Italians did not pretend to be more humane than the rest of the great family, and the moment that Isabel had fainted, and Percy had disappeared, the multitude began to express their impatience to any further delay by all means in their possession.

The Government annually assigned marriage portions to twelve young maidens selected from the great body of the people, of those not sufficiently opulent to secure husbands, or find the adequate means for marriage without this help. To bestow these maidens upon their lovers, and with them the portions allotted by the state, constituted the first, and in the eyes of the masses, the most interesting and attractive part of the spectacle.

A cardinal on this occasion bestowed his blessing upon the chosen couples in a highly edifying manner, and to these succeeded the high-born and the wealthy nobles, who now approached the altar to receive the final benediction which committed them to every hope of happiness.

But where is our heroine? It is her turn now. Her cruel parents still remain unsubdued and unsoftened by her deep and touching sorrow. She is again made to rise, to totter forward to the altar, scarcely cognisant of anything except perhaps, the worthless, but wealthy, Ulric Grimani is by her side.

Once more the mournful spectacle restores to the spectators all their bitter feelings. They perceive the cruelty of the sacrifice to which Isabel's relatives are insensible. In vain do they murmur "shame!" In vain does she turn her vacant and yet expressive eyes—expressive, because of their very soulless vacancy—to that stern, ambitious mother, whose bosom no longer responds to her child with the true maternal feeling.

Hopeless of help from that quarter, the young creature lifts her eyes to heaven, and, no longer listening to the words of the holy man, she surrenders herself only to despair.

Is it heaven that hearkens to her prayer? Is it the merciful work of an angel that bursts open the doors of the church at the very moment when she is called upon to yield that response which dooms her for ever to misery? To her ears the thunders which now shook the church were the fruits of heaven's benignant interposition.

The report of firearms, the shrieks of women on every hand, the oaths and shouts of fierce and insolent authority, the clamour of men, the struggles and cries of those who seek safety in flight or sue for mercy, suggests no other idea to the wretched Isabel than that she is saved from the hated embraces of Ulric Grimani.

She is only conscious that, heedless of her and of the entreaties of her mother, he is the first to endeavour selfishly to save himself by flight. But her escape from Grimani is only the prelude to other embraces.

She knows not, unhappy child, that she is an object of desire to another until she finds herself lifted in the strong arms of Ill Passotore, the dreaded chief of the Locarno brigands. He and his brothers have kept their pledges to one another.

Their fierce followers have subdued to submission the struggles of a weaponless multitude, who, with horror and consternation, behold the loveliest of their damsels borne away in the arms of the ruthless brigands to their ready gondolas.

Those who resisted them perished. The fainting and shrieking women are hurried from the sight of their kinsmen and their lovers, and the gondolas of the brigands are about to depart with their precious freight.

Ill Passotore, the chief, stands with one foot upon his vessel's side and the other upon the marble steps of the cathedral. Still insensible, the lovely Isabel lies upon his breast. At that moment his sash is plucked by a bold hand. He

turns to meet the glance of the sybil. The old woman leered on him with eyes that seemed to mock his triumph, even while she spoke of it.

"Is it not even as I told thee—as I showed thee?" she demanded.

"It is," exclaimed the brigand chief, as he threw her a purse of gold. "Thou art a true prophetess. Fate has done her work."

He was gone; his gondola was far out in the lake beside the others of his band, and he himself might now be seen bending over his precious prize and striving to bring back the life blood into her cheeks.

"Ay, indeed," muttered the gipsy, "thou hast had her in thy arms; but think not, reckless robber as thou art, that fate has done its work. The work is but begun. Fate has kept its word to thee; it is thy weak sense that fancied she had nothing more to say or do."

Even as she spoke these words the gondolas, containing Percy Villiers and his friends, were already on the track of the daring abductors. He had succeeded in collecting a gallant band of volunteers, who tacitly yielded him the command.

The excitement had served in some measure to relieve the distress under which he suffered. He was no longer the lover, but the man—ay, and the leader of men. Now that he was persuaded by the gipsy, whom all believed and feared, that nameless and terrible danger overhung his beloved, which was to be met and baffled only by the course he was pursuing, his whole being seemed to be inspired by a new spirit. His companions wondered to behold the change. Percy was now the confident and courageous commander, his breast stirred by martial ardour as of old, when he led his men to the field. Again he wielded the sabre that was rusting in its scabbard, which had not been used since that memorable day. Enough for him that there was danger; of this he no longer entertained a doubt.

Whether the danger that was supposed to threaten Isabel was still suggestive of a hope—as the prediction of the Spanish gipsy might well warrant—may very well be questioned. It was in the very desperation of his hope, perhaps, that his energies became at once equally well ordered and intense. He impelled all his agencies to their utmost exertions. The slight craft groaned beneath the powerful strokes of the oarsmen, and soon the efforts of the pursuers were rewarded.

A gondola, bearing a single individual, drifted along their path. He was a fugitive from Monza, who gave them the first definite idea of the outrage of the brigands. His tidings, rendered imperfect by his terrors, were still enough to goad the pursuers to new exertions. Fortune favoured the pursuit. In their haste the gondolas of the brigands had become entangled with other small crafts which encumbered the canal. The keen eye of Percy was the first to discover them.

"Forward!" he cried, inciting his followers to their utmost speed. "They are in our power. A few moments more, and we shall be upon them. They cannot escape us now."

The eye of the young English leader flashed with the expectation of the coming struggle. His exulting, eager voice declared the strength and confidence of his soul, and cheered the spirits of all around him. The sturdy oarsmen "gave way" with renewed efforts. The followers of our hero, who were principally composed of the lovers of the stolen brides, prepared their weapons for the conflict. It was at hand—it came. The brigands could expect no mercy, and they asked none; accordingly but few words were exchanged between the contending parties.

"Yield, base robber!" was the stern demand of Percy to the brigand chief.

"Never to thee, presumptuous foreigner," was the scornful reply of Ill Passotore. "We are not likely to be frightened by such as thee."

With this reply the gondolas met. The Italians leaped on board the brigands' slight vessel with a fury little short of madness. It

was in vain that the marauders fought as they had long been accustomed to; it needed something more than customary valour to meet the fury of their assailants. Mercy now was neither asked nor given, nor, as it seemed, did the brigands care to live when they beheld the fall of their terrible leader.

He had crossed weapons with Percy Villiers, in whom he met his match. Twice had the sword of the young soldier passed through the breast of the brigand chief, but Ill Passotore was a fearful enemy. He was conquered, it is true, but he had left his mark upon his conqueror—he had bitten deep before he fell. Percy was severely wounded, though in the excitement of the fray he scarcely heeded it. Little did he conjecture the import of the few words which the dying chief gasped forth at his feet.

"I have indeed had thee in my arms," he said, retaining possession of the unconscious Isabel, whom he had never relinquished for a single moment during his conflict with Villiers. "I have had thee in my arms. I must lose thee, but thou shalt never become the wife of another," he gasped, with a grim smile of triumph, and swifter than thought, he drew a stiletto and raised it on high, about to bury it in the lovely girl's bosom.

Villiers, who was powerless to prevent the action, closed his eyes and uttered an exclamation of horror, but at that moment of deadly peril an unseen hand wrenched the weapon from the grasp of the would-be assassin. It was the work of Percy's ever watchful friend, Lelio Trivulo.

Failing in his sinister purpose, and thirsting for vengeance, the brigand chief gathered together all his fast-ebbing strength, and by a mighty effort threw himself into the heaving waters with the fair girl locked in his fatal embrace.

A cry more terrible than before arose from the panting combatants, as they beheld the lovely form of Isabel disappear beneath the water. The next instant, however, Villiers had plunged in after her, and succeeded, after a terrible struggle, in releasing her from the death grip of Ill Passotore.

Wholly exhausted, he at length reaches the bank with his precious burden, where a number of willing hands are stretched forth to receive him. Overcome by the unnatural exertion and the serious nature of his wounds, he sinks back insensible.

The victors returned with their spoil. They brought back the captured brides in triumph. That same evening preparations were made to conclude the bridal ceremonies, which had been so fearfully interrupted.

With a single exception, the original distribution of the brides was completed. That exception, as well may be supposed, was Isabel Courtney. It was no longer possible for her unnatural parents to withstand the popular sentiment.

The cardinal himself was particularly active in persuading the reluctant mother to submit to what seemed so evidently the will of destiny. But for the despicable baseness and cowardice of Ulric Grimani, it is probable she never would have yielded, but his contemptible and unmanly terror in the moment of danger had been too conspicuous.

Even his great wealth could not save him from the shame that followed his cowardly conduct, and, however unwillingly, the parents of Isabel consented that she should become the wife of Percy Villiers as the only fitting reward for the gallantry which had saved her, and so many more, from dishonour.

But where was the victorious bridegroom? His friends have been dispatched for him? Why comes he not? Isabel, now happy beyond her hope, awaits him at the altar; but still he comes not. In a state of stupor Percy Villiers lies upon the couch of his friend Lelio, when the aged prophetess appears beside his bed.

"He is called," she said. "The cardinal demand his presence. They will bestow upon him his beauteous bride, Isabel Courtney. You must bear him thither."

The physician at once gravely shook his head. "It may arouse him," said Lelio, tenderly. "We can bear him thither on a litter, so that he shall feel no pain."

"It were something to awake him from this deadly lethargy," mused the man of science. "Be it as you wish."

Thus grievously wounded, was the noble young soldier borne into the midst of the assembly, for whom he had suffered and done so much. The sweet soft music which played around awakened him. His eyes unclosed to discover the lovely Isabel, tearful, but hopeful, bending fondly over him.

She declared herself wholly his. The voice of the man confirmed the assurance, and the eye of the sinking Percy brightened into the life of a new and delightful consciousness. Eagerly he spoke, his voice was but a whisper.

"Make it so, I pray you, that I may live."

The priest drew nigh. The marriage service was performed, and the hands of the two were clasped in one.

"Said I not that you would possess her," whispered an aged woman, who approached the moment after the ceremony and whose face was beamed by none but him whom she addressed; "thou hast well won her. She is thine," and she was gone.

A faint smile played about the lips of Villiers, but he made no answer. His hand drew that of Isabel closer. She stooped to kiss and whisper words of love to him, but he heard her not. With the consciousness of the sweet treasure that he had won, after such sad denial, the senses remained conscious no longer. He lay apparently lifeless in the embrace of Isabel, who appeared almost as devoid of life.

For weeks he lay hovering upon the borders of the world of shadows; but at length Isabel's fond and tender care prevailed. She nursed him back to life and love. What joy, what ecstasy, was now hers. Three months later the happy pair left the city of the sea for England, in order that Percy should take possession of a princely estate, bequeathed him by a deceased uncle.

Years have passed since Percy returned to his native land, and the love which now is blessed with the tenderness of a young mother is fresh and pure as of yore. As Percy stands upon the terrace, watching the sun fading from the lovely landscape, the sound of merry laughter rang upon his ear.

It proceeded from a group of blue-eyed, golden haired children, who are seated beneath the shade of an overhanging tree. A smile of peaceful content irradiates the features of the happy father, as he gazes upon the fairy-like picture.

Now they are all hushed again, for Isabel is singing them an evening hymn before they go to bed, while the soft fluttering breeze and the splash of the fountain form a sweet symphony to her song, and thus we leave them. F. F.

VIOLA HARCOURT;

OR,

PLAYING WITH HEARTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Evander," "Tempting Fortune," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE TOILS AGAIN.

"I know I shan't like her, whoever she is," was Viola's mental exclamation. "She seems too solemn and self-important."

"How are you?" cried Sandford, cheerfully. "and how is Herbert. Better, I hope. You are a little pale—too much watching. Anxiety is bad. We must change all that. My dear, this is Miss Sutton," he added, turning to his wife;

"an old flame of mine. Don't be jealous, it is all over now, isn't it, Vi? Allow me to introduce my wife."

The lady raised her veil and burst out laughing, while Viola caught her hand eagerly, saying:

"Lucy Travers! Well I never! Who would have thought it?"

"Yes, my dear, Lucy Travers, late of the Theatre Royal Vesuvian. Now, Mrs. Sandford Newton, of nowhere in particular."

"Come in and take off your things. My maid shall see to your boxes. You know that you are very, very welcome in my house. Can I ever forget your kindness to me when I was poor and friendless? Come in, dear, and tell me how it all happened."

They kissed one another as old friends of the tender sex will kiss after a long separation, and entered the morning room, where Miss Agnew was reading a French novel.

"My companion, Miss Agnew," said Viola.

The companion bowed distantly, and again became immersed in her reading, as if she knew better than to interfere in a conversation which did not concern her.

"Let me congratulate you most warmly, Sandford, on your choice," said Viola. "May you be happy."

"I am sure I am, and as Lucy says she is, I have no reason to doubt her assertion," replied Newton. "We met at the theatre one evening, and I escorted her home. This led to an invitation to call. I did; I saw that she was my fate. I threatened to destroy myself if she did not have me. She refused me at first, all girls do—this was accompanied by a sly look at Viola—at last she relented; we were married. The stage has lost an ornament, but I have gained a pearl beyond all price."

"And I," exclaimed Lucy, "have acquired a very good and obedient husband, who puts up with my temper and takes his scoldings like a good boy."

Sandford went upstairs to see Herbert, whom he found in a very weak condition, which was chiefly owing to his great loss of blood. Yet he was perfectly rational and bore his confinement bravely, looking forward with resignation to the long time he would have to remain in the house a prisoner in the sick room.

Being somewhat fatigued after the journey she had taken, Lucy asked permission to rest in the drawing-room until the afternoon. Viola regretted that she could not see the beauties of the park, as the weather was everything that could be desired. She was going out to finish a little sketch she was making of deer feeding among the fern, and Miss Agnew accompanied her.

The features of Miss Agnew were unusually stern and hard that day. She seemed as if she had made up her mind to do something desperate. Even Viola, accustomed as she was to her fits of moroseness, noticed it, and an involuntary shudder ran through her.

"I shall send her away now Lucy has come," thought Viola.

"I will bring matters to a climax," was what Miss Agnew was thinking about.

Leaving Lucy with some books, and Sandford upstairs with Herbert, Viola set out with her companion for that end of the park which was situated near The Rosary. While she was seated on a camp stool, filling in her sketch, Miss Agnew sauntered away, coming back in a quarter of an hour with some roses.

"Where do you get those pretty flowers?" asked Viola, looking at them admiringly. "I noticed you with some similar ones the other day."

"Hard by here," replied the companion. "They grow in a garden a little way up the high road."

"And do they let you take them?"

"The lady of the house kindly told me I could always have some when I wanted."

Viola hastily packed up her sketching materials and gave the camp stool to Miss Agnew to carry, that being one of her duties.

"I am tired of drawing," she exclaimed, "and want to get back to Lucy. Would not

poor dear Herbert be pleased with a nice lot of roses like those?"

"Indeed he would. They are so pleasant in a sick room. I was about to suggest that you should come to the lady's house and get some."

"That will be capital. Shall we go through the park gates?"

"I know a nearer way than that," replied Miss Agnew. "There is a gap in the hedge. You only have to remove a few thorns, and you are quite close to The Rosary."

"Oh, The Rosary, is it?" said Viola, recollecting the conversation she had had with the housekeeper respecting the new tenant of this house.

For a moment she felt suspicious, but the feeling soon passed away, as she scouted the idea of any harm happening to her so near home. Miss Agnew led the way, and they were, in five minutes, walking up the pleasant garden-path to the house.

Tapping gently at the door, Viola heard a voice invite her to enter, which she did, finding herself in a prettily furnished boudoir in which sat a lady dressed in black. The door closed behind her, and she fancied she heard a key turn in the lock.

Nor was she mistaken, for Miss Agnew had entered after her and locked the door, against which she stood. Perfectly bewildered at this strange action, she looked again at the lady of the house, who had hitherto concealed her features with her hand. Now she looked her visitor straight in the face, and Viola trembled violently as she recognised Madame Menzies.

"What is this?" she exclaimed, nervously. "I have seen you before. Oh, I am betrayed! Someone has crippled Mr. Conyers so that he should not help me, and I am brought here for some terrible purpose."

"You are perfectly right in your conjecture," answered Madame Menzies. "I took you to Merton, Miss Sutton, from which your friends rescued you. As a matter of course you are not brought here for nothing. Sit down; and I will explain matters to you."

In a half-fainting condition, Viola sank into a chair and awaited with fear and trembling the explanation which was offered her.

Madame Menzies did not try to exert her meagre power over Viola on this occasion. There was no occasion for it. She was pursuing very different tactics. Calmly seated in an armchair, she looked at Viola as if she was an object of contempt rather than pity, while Miss Agnew indulged in a self-satisfied smile at the result of her manoeuvre.

"Miss Sutton," began Madame Menzies, "must have thought Lord Turlington very simple if she imagined that he was going to sit down under the great wrong she has done him."

"What wrong has he suffered at my hands?" asked Viola.

Madame Menzies laughed as if highly amused at this question.

"How innocent you are," she said. "Do you not call it a wrong to take property from a man when he has enjoyed for years, and to brand him before the public and his friends as the author of an infamous fraud?"

"But it was all true."

"True?" said Madame Menzies, elevating her eyebrows. "It is for the purpose of extracting a full confession from you that you have been brought here to-day. Your friend and accomplice, Dr. Newton, is luckily dead, and—"

"Accomplice!" interjected Viola.

"Yes, I repeat it. Your accomplice, Dr. Newton, is no longer alive to bear you out in your infamy!"

"Really, I do not understand you."

"Wait a while; you will presently. We have to meet cunning by cunning. For that reason Miss Agnew was sent as your companion. You have told her that you and Dr. Newton conspired together to get up this story of the children being changed at birth, in order to spite Lord Turlington because he struck Sandford Newton, when you know perfectly well

that you are the daughter of old Harcourt who married the French milliner in Chelsea."

Viola clasped her hands piteously. "Heaven forgive you for concocting such a falsehood!" she said.

"We shall see where the falsehood is in time. Miss Agnew has brought you here in order that you may make reparation."

"She is a false traitress!" cried Viola. "I always distrusted her, and she will get her reward hereafter."

The two women laughed heartily at this speech.

"Yes," said Miss Agnew, "and it will be a golden reward, will it not, madame?"

"Rely upon that, my child," replied Menzies. "But we will not discuss that or argue the point with this young lady."

She rose and took a legal-looking document from a drawer in a bureau, which she placed upon the table.

"Here is a paper drawn up by a clever lawyer," she continued. "Read it, Miss Sutton, and when you have done so, if you sign it, we will witness your signature and you shall be at liberty to depart."

With trembling hands Viola seized the document and hastily perused it, becoming more and more startled and horrified as she progressed. It was as follows:

"I, the undersigned, Viola Harcourt, falsely called Sutton, urged by the stings of a guilty conscience and a remorse which gives me no peace night or day, do of my own free will, and without pressure from anyone, make the following confession. The late Doctor Newton solicited me to be his partner in the crime of depriving Lord Tarlington of his property and placing a stigma on his name in order that he, the doctor, might have revenge upon his lordship for an insult offered by the latter to the doctor's son one night in the Duke's Club. I agreed that he should represent me as the child of the late Lord Tarlington changed at birth, and we forged the contents of a sealed packet I represented as being left for me with my aunt by my mother. I wish to state unreservedly that the whole thing is and was a pure fabrication on the part of Dr. Newton and myself, I being his wicked accomplice, and I sign this paper in the hope that by making reparation I shall be pardoned for the sin which I have committed."

"Sign this!" cried Viola, her cheeks flushing with honest indignation. "Never!"

"I think you will change your mind in time," said Madame Menzies.

Unable to control her temper, Viola tore the paper in several pieces and cast them at Menzies' feet.

"There," she added, "that is how I treat your paper!"

"It matters little," replied the madame, calmly; "that is only the copy."

"What?"

"The original is in my bureau, and can be brought out at a moment's notice when you are ready to sign."

Viola sank back in her chair as if crushed. There was no limit to this woman's resources. She never forgot anything.

"No matter," said Viola; "I refuse to sign such an infamous document. What next?"

"You will remain here until you do."

"Oh," replied Viola, "you cannot keep me here as you did at Meriton. I will appeal to your servant or attract the attention of the passers-by."

"My servant is deaf and half blind. She is in addition entirely devoted to my interests, so that would help you very little. The outside of the house you will never see, as you will not be allowed out of my sight or Miss Agnew's."

"Is she going to stay here?"

"I have given her an invitation. She thinks she would find the Hall a little dull without you, because she is so attached to you."

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Agnew, with a sneer and a spiteful look, "I hate her like poison!"

"Very well. I will accept the situation and

stay here," exclaimed Viola. "I defy you to make me sign that paper!"

"You will find your place no sinecure," remarked Madame Menzies.

"What do you mean?"

"You will have to wait upon Miss Agnew and myself, and I assure you we shall be very exacting. Look on that sofa; you will discover a cotton dress and a French cap, such as will suit you better than the silk you are wearing; put them on."

Viola looked from one to the other, but she saw no compassion in the stony faces of these two women.

"I have a cane here, which will quicken your movements," continued Madame Menzies; "you must do as you are told promptly."

"Do you intend to torture me?" asked Viola, aghast.

"Certainly, if you render it necessary."

With a sigh and an inward rebellious struggle of the heart Viola took off her nice clothes and donned those indicated by her new mistress. It was deeply humiliating to her, but she could not help herself. When she had accomplished the task she sat down.

"Take off my boots," cried Miss Agnew, "and then go in the next room, get a brush, and dress my hair."

"Be your maid!" said Viola.

"Certainly," was the calm reply.

Viola hesitated, but Madame Menzies took up a small tin case which she tossed carelessly to Miss Agnew.

"Use it if you like," she exclaimed.

Miss Agnew caught it in her hand and struck Viola a couple of sharp blows on the shoulder which almost cut through the thin dress she wore, making her cry out loudly with the severity of the pain.

"Down on your knees—quick," she said.

Viola sank upon the carpet at once, and proceeded to unbutton her new mistress's boots, which was not an agreeable task, as there had been rain in the night and her walk had covered them with mud.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Miss Agnew; "I like this: it is highly amusing. She put on mine enough when at the Hall. It is my turn now. I repeat, I like it."

Madame Menzies laughed too, and when Viola had finished her task she directed her where to find a pair of dainty satin slippers wherewith to encase her late companion's feet, after which the latter let down her hair which she had brushed for half-an-hour until Viola's arms ached.

"When Lord Tarlington comes into his own again," remarked Miss Agnew, "and pays us what he promised, we will go to Paris, you and I chère amie, and enjoy ourselves."

"That is my intention," replied Madame Menzies. "If this girl," she went on, indicating Viola by a movement of the head, "wants a place I will engage her. She brushes hair very nicely. It is quite a luxury. She does not pull a bit."

"Do you think I would serve you," answered Viola, "if I could help it?"

Miss Agnew looked up threateningly.

"Where's that cane?" she said. "I will have no impertinence."

"But surely I may speak."

"Surely you may not. Don't answer me. I will whip you more for that than anything. Our relative positions are reversed. You are my servant now."

"I never treated you like a servant," said Viola.

"But that is how I mean to treat you. It will be your place to wait on the table at dinner-time, and afterwards you can sing and read to us unless we have some sewing for you to do."

Viola made no further reply. She went on mechanically brushing the glossy black hair, which glistened on her fingers, and remembered the Israelites in their captivity—how they sat down by the waters of Babylon and wept, refusing to sing to their captive the song of Zion.

Then her thoughts wandered to the Hall, and she pictured Bertie Conyers anxiously awaiting

her coming, for she always went to see him in the middle of the day, and the tears came unbidden to her eyes. Sandford Newton and Lucy would also expect her. They would wait dinner, would send out messengers to scour the country for her, and be more surprised than ever at gaining no tidings of her.

Then Sandford would exercise all his newly-acquired detective skill, and when she thought of that her hopes began to rise again. Decidedly Sandford was her strong point, but would he ever think of looking for her so near home? It was more likely that he would go up to London, thinking that she had been spirited away in that direction.

At dinner-time she had to assist the old cook in laying the table and waiting upon her mistresses. When they had finished she was permitted to eat what was left. During the evening they kept her employed, and at night she had to sleep on the floor in Madame Menzies' room, the door being carefully locked and the key placed under the madame's pillow.

So her slavery began and went on, becoming each day more intolerable; harsh words and blows were her portion, it being her tormentors' purpose to make her sign the paper proving herself a fraud. Yet she bore all and refused.

When Viola, in her captivity, thought of the misery her absence would cause among her friends at the Hall, she did not exaggerate the picture at all. Sandford Newton and Lucy, finding she did not return, took upon themselves to go in search of her.

They looked through the park without success; questioned the lodge-keeper, who had not seen anyone go out, and went back to the house to give an alarm, as Sandford imagined something untoward had happened.

He sent people in every direction to make inquiries, remaining very much distressed at the Hall. At the very first sight he had taken a dislike to Miss Agnew, intending to ask her some questions which he fancied she would have some difficulty in answering.

She had, however, deprived him of the opportunity, and he could not but think that his sudden arrival was the cause of her disappearance with Viola. Night fell, and the messengers returned without any tidings of the missing ladies. They had not been seen in the neighbouring towns or at the railway stations, so that the affair was a complete mystery.

"What is the meaning of it?" asked Lucy.

"Lord Tarlington, my dear," Sandford replied. "Can't you see? First of all Herbert Conyers is knocked on the head so as to render him powerless in Viola's defence, and then this Miss Agnew, who is evidently in his lordship's employ, takes Vi away somewhere. Oh, it is a very simple scheme; but Tarlington forgot two things."

"Tell me what they are."

"First, that I am a private detective instead of being as I was formerly, a public fool; and, second, that I am a guest at the Hall."

"Do try and find them, Sandford," exclaimed Lucy. "I feel so sorry for Viola, and I don't know what we shall do without her."

"I do. Order dinner at once. I'm hungry and thirsty, too. They used to say that Tarlington had some capital wine in his cellar. To-night will be a good opportunity to try it."

"For shame to talk in that way, when you ought to be out looking for the poor girl," said Lucy.

"Nothing can be done to-night," replied Sandford Newton, oracularly. "Wait, I know my business, if I have not been long at it."

Lucy was contented with this answer, for she had more confidence in her husband than perhaps he deserved. They dined together, the servants waiting upon them just as if their mistress was at home, and the following day Sandford started out to make inquiries.

He could learn absolutely nothing of Viola and Miss Agnew, so he sent their photographs to London to his agents and put the local police to work as well. There was actually no clue.

(To be Continued.)



[A WORK OF ART.]

HIS WEIGHT IN GOLD.

MISS BETSY MAY handed her nephew the letter that she had received that morning from Scotland, saying:

"Read this letter, Robert."

"Hum," said Robert May, inconclusively, as he folded it up again.

"They are my sister's children," said Miss Betsy. "I must do something for them."

"Send for them?" suggested Robert.

"I suppose so. It will be a trial, though, at my time of life. Two young girls. They will want to have gay company, and to go about. Just as I have"—she was going to say gotten rid of—she substituted, "Just as Mary and Margaret have married, and are established in homes of their own."

Robert May was thirty-five, and beginning to be a good deal of an old bachelor himself. He looked around him somewhat ruefully. He was acquiring a growing fondness for his cigar and his newspaper, and his quiet of an evening, with Aunt Betsy nodding peacefully in her chair the other side of the fireplace.

"How old are they, Aunt Betsy?"

"Let me see. Edith is twenty-two; Isabel is a year younger."

"Then we couldn't send them to school?"

"Hardly."

"So all that's left will be to make the most of them at home."

"Then you think I ought to send for them?"

"What else can you do?"

"Yes, they are my sister's children, and their father's death has left them actually in want. He had nothing but his salary as a book-keeper."

Accordingly, that evening Miss Betsy wrote a letter to Fortescue, in which she extended an invitation to herself and her sister to make her home in London for the present. Miss Betsy wrote by lamplight, in spite of her seventy years, and that in a clear, bold handwriting. The next day she enclosed a draft to pay the girls' expenses from Scotland. She wrote that she should expect them two days afterwards.

The girls telegraphed that they were coming that day. Miss Betsy showed the telegram to her nephew at the dinner-table.

"They will be here to-night," she said. "I gave them explicit directions what to do."

"Why didn't you tell them to wait at an hotel? I would have met them."

"Perfectly useless. They must learn to take care of themselves. We are both of us too fond of our comfort to be put out very easily. It is as well they should know just what they are coming to."

"Well, I'll meet them at the train."

Which he fully intended to do. But he began an interesting article in a new magazine, and

the time slipped by before he knew it. The clock on the mantel chimed eleven. The train had been and gone. There went the parting whistle of the locomotive speeding out of town!

"By Jove!" he said. "Too bad, Aunt Betsy. I've kept those little girls waiting."

Aunt Betsy had dropped off to sleep. She started up quickly.

"Did you speak, Rob? Oh, off to meet the girls? Very well."

Robert dashed off—out of the house, down the street. At the corner a cab passed him. Speeding along, he looked back, and saw it drew up at his aunt's door. Then he returned on his steps, as quickly as he had sped away. He reached the door in time to assist a little figure in black to alight. Another little figure in black stood already on the sidewalk.

"My dear children," he said, "can I ever sufficiently express my contrition to you? But I—my watch—the clock. Come in! I'll see to all this"—indicating driver and luggage. "Come in?"

He threw open the hall-door, and almost carried them both into the bright, square, hospitable hall. The bustle aroused Aunt Betsy. She came forward and bade them welcome as they stood on the threshold of the parlour. It was too old-fashioned a room to be called a drawing-room.

It had a centre-table with a bright crimson cloth, flowers, books, a lamp of the variety known as astral. A bright wood fire burned on the wide, deep hearth. Robert rolled up two arm-chairs in front of this cheery fire.

"Which is Isabel? Which is Edith?" asked Aunt Betsy, seating them each, and returning to her own chair in the corner.

"I am Edith," said the girl next her.

"You are not at all like your mother. You are like the Fortescues. Well, you are like an excellent good man."

Isabel had been as pale as the driven snow before this. Now the blood flamed up into her white face—the index of keen feeling. Their father had only been dead two months. The child had not yet recovered from the sharp, stinging pain of her loss.

They were both lovely. Golden hair, grey-blue eyes, skin white as—I needs must use the well-known simile of the driven snow again, the purest thing in nature—with mantling blushes, like the sunset on a winter's plain.

These girls were not often pale as they were on the night of their first arrival. Generally they were like a bunch of red and white roses. York and Lancaster struggled for the mastery in their cheeks.

Robert, having seen that the trunks were carried upstairs and that the driver was compensated, came back into the parlour.

"Ring the bell, Robert," said Aunt Betsy, briskly. "The girls must have a bite before they go to bed. Samuel will understand."

Samuel in truth did understand, and made his appearance in a few moments to announce that "supper was ready."

Robert escorted Isabel across the hall, and Aunt Betsy escorted Edith; or rather Edith offered her strong young arm to Aunt Betsy, who accepted it graciously.

"I am old and stiff, child," she said. "I'm more fit to be led than to lead."

So across the hall they went to the large, panelled dining-room running across the whole back of the house—a charming room where a supper-table was spread, lighted with wax candles, and bright with the beautiful May silver.

"Chocolate, girls? No coffee, as I wanted you to sleep after your journey. Or will you have wine? Stewed oysters. Samuel, hand Miss Fortescue the broiled oysters. This is a month with an r in it, my dear. Don't be afraid of them. We are very proud of our oysters. Well, girls, now that you've come, I'm very glad to see you. It seems only yesterday that your mother left me. She and I kept house together here for very many years."

"I have often heard mamma describe this

dining-room," Edith said. "It seems like—almost like home to me."

"Your mother and I had planned always to keep house together here. But she changed her mind. She fell in love, and left me to keep old maids' hall alone. Alone, that is, except for my brother's children, who came to me when she left. Old maid as I am, I may say I have brought up two sets of children. My own brother and sister first; then my brother's and sister's children."

"I hope they have all been a credit to you, Aunt Betsy," Robert said. "Of course you think I have; don't you?"

"I don't complain, Robert," said matter-of-fact Miss Betsy.

Robert looked at the two girls and laughed.

"I and my father before me have been Aunt Betsy's hardest subjects. She had to bring us up on theory."

"Ah, well, for the matter of that, your father and I brought each other up. It was a mutual thing. But the others were so much younger. I was twenty years younger than these girls' mother."

The ice was broken, and Edith and Isabel had been taken in. After that, they had no cause to complain of the selfishness or coldness of either aunt or cousin. Aunt Betsy was all that a kind-hearted, generous old lady, who had mothered first one and then another waif and stray all her life, could be.

And Robert? They seemed like mere little girls to him. He was good to them. He, in fact, put himself out for them. He took them to theatre, concert, panoramas, to anything that stopped over night at Raleigh on its way to larger towns. He submitted to being bored many times for their sakes.

He had always cultivated conversation for Aunt Betsy's sake. He now endeavoured to be doubly agreeable, because when he came home to dinner he fancied that his little cousins often looked homesick and bored.

He always thought of them as his little consins. In fact, they were very young for their years. They had led very quiet lives. To tell the truth, they had never known any man before as they had known him, except their father. Their deep mourning prevented their making any acquaintances now.

By a stretch of etiquette, Miss Betsy had decided that it would be perfectly proper for them to go and see a play or to hear a concert, even although they paid no visits; and the girls did not demur at going to public entertainments. They did not always enjoy themselves; no more, in fact, than Robert enjoyed himself. But Robert was none the wiser. He did not dream that that they often accepted his invitations because they could not bear to say no to a proffered kindness of their thoughtful kinsman.

"Some one has been stealing your pretty face, Edith," he said one morning at breakfast. "Did you know that Raleigh boasted an artist? Well, it does. And this artist has taken a fancy to you; or to your head. He asked me to step into his—workshop yesterday, and look at his statue, which I did. And I said I would like you to see it, and he begged me to bring you. Will you and Isa go?"

"Who is he? My face?"

"Yes; your face. Who is he? A stonecutter. But he is a genius in his way. He was given an order for a monument for a young girl—something out of the common line. So he plumed his wings for a loftier flight than usual. And the result is exceedingly creditable."

"When shall we go?"

"After breakfast."

So after breakfast they sallied forth, in the clear, frosty winter's morning. The stonecutter's yard was not far off. They turned into it, then entered a small wooden building of two or three rooms. A middle-aged man, with a sober, pleasant face, came forward to meet them.

"Good-morning, Mr. Kuhn. These are my consins, the Misses Fortescue. We have called to look at Millard's Angel."

"Glad to see you. This way, ladies, Mil-

lard," to a slight, earnest-faced boy, "these ladies have come to look at your figure."

Millard led the way with heightened colour to the inner room. There stood his work, in grey clay. A mourning angel, with folded wings. It was simple and expressive and touching. And it bore a strong resemblance to Edith Fortescue.

"I hope you will not be offended, miss; but we all tell Millard that it is easy to see who he took for his model."

Edith blushed.

"You mean it is like me? So my cousin said. Offended? How could I be? It is a very beautiful figure!"

"It is his first attempt, which makes it all the more remarkable. We don't often turn off work of this kind. Would you like to look at the shop, ladies? I have some very pretty specimens of marbles, and one or two contrivances for sawing and planing."

The girls agreed. Mr. Kuhn walked by Edith's side, and did the honours of his shop. He talked very intelligently and fluently. And Edith found the matter of his conversation entertaining. She was sorry when they had exhausted the subject. Robert pulled out his watch.

"I'm sorry to hurry you, girls, but I'm due at the court-house at eleven. My client will use violent language if I'm not on hand. Mr. Kuhn, we are very much indebted to you. Millard, you'll earn laurels yet. Good-morning."

"What do you think of him?" queried Robert, as he parted from his consins.

"A very unusual man for his station," replied Edith, promptly.

"I meant Millard."

"Oh! I like his statue."

"Millard is bound to succeed. Mr. Kuhn will push him on. Mr. Kuhn is an excellent man—none better. Just the man to help a clever, friendless boy. Entirely self-made as the phrase goes. What you might call a diamond in the rough. But indeed I must be off. Good-bye, girls. Edith, I think you twice as good-looking since Millard drew translated you into an angel."

The sisters stood on the front doorsteps and watched their cousin walk down the street rapidly. He was a splendid-looking fellow. The kind of man who had always commanded the world. Isabel looked after him until he was quite out of sight. Then she turned into the house with a tender half-smile on her face.

They told Aunt Betsy about Drew's angel. She expressed great interest, and asked a great many questions.

"At James Kuhn's, did you say? How James Kuhn has succeeded! I remember him as an errand-boy at Mr. Jones's grocery shop. They say he is made of money now. Vulgar and purse-proud?"

"Really, I can't say. I scarcely spoke to him," Isabel said.

"He struck me as a very simple, unostentatious man; and very well-informed and agreeable," spoke Edith.

"Agreeable! I can't quite believe that, child."

"Yes, I should call him agreeable. He is original. And originality always has a charm of its own, I think."

"He ought to be highly honoured to have attracted the notice of Miss Fortescue," said Aunt Betsy, drily. "I did not know you were so close an observer of human nature."

"I am not always," Edith replied. "But a person of that kind always attracts me. Robert called him a self-made man. That involves so much energy and pluck."

"But it does not compensate for early associations and refinement; nor would, if he were worth his weight in gold," said Aunt Betsy, sharply.

She had very distinct recollections of the early days of James Kuhn. His father had been a confirmed drunkard, and his mother had been reduced to begging her children's bread. Many was the meal Miss Betsy had supplied them from her own table.

The subject of James Kuhn was dropped. A week or so went by. One day came a beautiful model in grey stone of the mourning angel, a third smaller than the original. Accompanying it was a card: Mr. Kuhn's compliments to Miss Fortescue.

The family were at dinner when the statuette was brought in. Samuel stood before Edith gravely holding it.

"Put it on the sideboard, Samuel," Robert said. "Then we can all look at it."

"Mr. Kuhn's compliments to Miss Fortescue," sniffed Aunt Betsy. "That passes me. A piece of impertinence."

"I am delighted to have the statuette. It strikes me as a piece of thoughtful kindness," Edith said.

"Kuhn is a good sort of a fellow. I daresay he meant it for the best," said Robert, carelessly.

"He should have sent the statuette with a note addressed to you, Robert, asking you to request Miss Fortescue to do him the honour to accept the accompanying trifle, and so on. The idea of sending his card to Edith as though he were an acquaintance—an equal."

"My dear aunt, he certainly considers himself the latter. He is rich as Croesus."

"Edith, I have half a mind to make you send the thing back."

Robert, glancing up, caught a rebellious look in Edith's eyes, and saw the colour flame up into her cheeks.

"Nonsense, Aunt Betsy!" he said, hastily. "I think Edith had a fair claim to a copy of the statuette; and there the matter may end, I should say. I'll undertake to see Kuhn, and say something civil to him in Edith's behalf."

This Robert accordingly did. Robert could be exceedingly gracious when he chose, and he almost always chose. He was struck by the eager manner which Mr. Kuhn displayed when he expressed Edith's thanks. As he walked away, he said to himself:

"Really, if I were to allow my imagination to run away with me I should say that Edith had made a conquest of Kuhn. Poor fellow, I hope not, for his sake!"

After that, whenever the sisters met Mr. Kuhn in the street he would address them with studied politeness. He was an earnest kind of man, and he carried this earnestness into everything he did, even in the trifling matter of recognition. But Isabel noticed a certain wistful, intent expression in his eyes, which somehow exasperated her whenever Edith was the person addressed by him. She was, I say, exasperated. It was so strange that Edith should tolerate such an expression. Although, for the matter of that, what could Edith do? At all events, she need not blush and look conscious whenever she saw Mr. Kuhn coming.

You and I, reader, are by this time aware that Mr. Kuhn is in love with Edith. Sober, middle-aged Mr. Kuhn has fallen desperately in love with a girl's pretty face, with a girl's pretty ways, almost at first sight. He has a full-sized copy of Millard's angel in the fine new house he has built for himself just out of town, and he finds his greatest consolation in studying that lovely face.

Meanwhile, he goes on with his daily work. He goes on making money. He has a talent for making money. He is one of those men of to-day who realise the old fable of Midas. He fully comprehends that, in his case, money must be the lever to lift him above the level of mediocrity. And he is an ambitious man.

Edith feels a strong, strange interest in this slow, quiet man which is not shared in the least by the rest of the family. She informs herself as to his position in the town. That is to say, as far as revealed by the newspapers. She discovers that he is the moving spirit in all public enterprises. He is the mayor of the town. He is the president of the bank. He is connected with a large factory recently established here.

One day a letter came for Edith. It was signed James Kuhn. It could hardly be said to be a love-letter; certainly it was as unconventional a love-letter as ever was written.

But it expressed tender and respectful admiration, and the writer begged to be permitted to make Miss Fortescue's further acquaintance.

The post had been brought in to the ladies when they were in Miss Betsy's own particular retreat, where they spent their mornings—a large, bright sitting-room opening out of her bedroom. Miss Betsy sat in her low easy-chair by the window; Edith sat opposite her on a footstool, sorting worsteds for the old lady's work. Isabel was standing between them, winding off skeins of scarlet wool. Miss Betsy had begun an afghan, which promised to be the work of a lifetime.

Edith read her letter, the telltale blushes dyeing her sweet face. As she laid it down timidly, she stole a look at Miss Betsy. At the same moment Miss Betsy had laid down her letter. The old lady looked perfectly overcome.

"Well," she said, "well, of all the extraordinary instances of presumption!"

"What is it, Aunt Betsy?" Isabel asked, all curiosity.

"Would you believe it? A letter from James Kuhn, the stone-cutter, about you, Edith."

"Yes, Aunt Betsy. He has written to me, too."

"He has never had the audacity?"

"Aunt Betsy"—Edith was turning rosier and rosier—"his letter is most respectful, unnecessarily so, it seems to me. I can't put the high value on myself that he does. I can't see any audacity in what he has done."

"My dear"—Aunt Betsy spoke in short, sharp sentences in her agitation—"you can't be expected to know as much about him as I. You are a stranger here. I have known him always. Good gracious! His father died in the gutter. I hardly think he could write, and he certainly could not speak the English language correctly."

"But Mr. Kuhn is very well spoken."

"Is he? I have never seen him nor spoken to him. I don't desire to."

Edith's red colour died out of her face. She looked down at the letter in her lap, took it up, unfolded it. The sight of a word or two written there gave her fresh courage.

"Aunt Betsy," she said, "I wish that you were willing I should know Mr. Kuhn."

Miss Betsy was speechless. She leaned back in her chair and gaped.

"Edith," she said, "are you dreaming? Why, child, I could never receive him in my house. It makes no difference whatever to me that he is a rich man now. I would not recognise him as a social equal, not if he were worth his weight in gold."

"Aunt Betsy, don't misunderstand me. I don't want you to think I am a silly girl, silly enough to be flattered out of my discretion by the first lover I ever had. Because, to tell the truth, I never did have a lover before. Nay"—here Edith laughed nervously—"am I not running away with the subject, taking it for granted that Mr. Kuhn wants to be my lover? He certainly does not say so, in so many words."

"He does to me. He tells me for the first time in his life his heart is touched. Rubbish! As if I cared a rush about his heart."

Aunt Betsy, I am not at all sure that I should like him as a lover. But I am sure I would as a friend. Oh, Aunt Betsy, I wish you would let him come to see me!"

"Edith, I am perfectly astonished at you. I am indeed, I must say, it is actually unlady like in you. What do you know of this—this plebeian upstart, except that he has the impertinence to write and tell you—you, a perfect stranger to him—that he admires you?"

"I know enough about him to make me wish to know him better. I should like to have him for a friend," Edith repeated.

There was a pause. Then Miss Betsy cleared her throat.

"At my time of life," she said, "it is impossible for me to form new habits, and to change my ways of thinking. It would shorten my days to throw my doors open to the sons of the

butchers and bakers and candlestick-makers of my youth."

"And it is your house," Edith said, with a lump in her throat and a mist before her eyes.

"Do you wish to see Mr. Kuhn's letter?" said Miss Betsy, coldly.

Edith took it and read it. What a curious sensation it gave her. In this letter Mr. Kuhn said in so many words that he desired to form Miss Fortescue's acquaintance, with a view of trying to win her for his wife. Such a strange, untried future opened before Edith as she read these words.

Such solemn possibilities of wifehood and happiness, or the reverse. There was something in the earnest, heartfelt tone in which the letter was worded which affected her singularly. She folded it up and handed it back to Aunt Betsy without a word. Meanwhile Miss Betsy boiled over again.

"Mrs. James Kuhn, indeed. My niece. Why, I could not bring myself to consent to it, not if he were worth his weight in gold."

Miss Betsy answered Mr. Kuhn's letter herself.

"It is quite unnecessary for you to reply," she told Edith. "In fact I would prefer you should not. I will see to it."

And Edith yielded. She was exceedingly childlike and docile. There was nothing in the least independent about her. She regarded her aunt as occupying a parent's place towards her.

"I have not a word to say," she told Isabel. "We both owe so much to Aunt Betsy. I can't cross her in her old age, and make her wretched."

"Edith, it is so strange; but I do believe you like him. Do you?"

"Perhaps I should if I knew him better. His letter has touched me. But I shall never know how well I like him. There is an end of everything between us. What am I saying? How can there be an end when there never was a beginning?"

"It seems such a pity," sighed Isabel. "Things are so apt to go wrong. Edith, don't you think you have given up too easily? Don't you think you had a right to insist more than you did?"

"I can't be sure. Aunt Betsy was so positive, I hadn't the heart to cross her. It was only my own happiness, after all."

"Not quite. Mr. Kuhn's, too."

Edith's ready colour flamed up.

"That seems too strange to be sure of. I can't realise that he could care, that it could make any difference to him."

So there the matter dropped between them. But a week or so after that Edith had occasion to go on an errand of charity a little distance out of town. She passed Mr. Kuhn's handsome house, set back on its trim lawn set with stately trees, and Mr. Kuhn himself stood at the gate. He bowed gravely to her. Edith hesitated, paused. Then by a sudden impulse—he looked so pale, grave, sad—she held out her hand.

"Mr. Kuhn," she said, "I was so sorry that it was not in my power to answer your letter. Perhaps Aunt Betsy did not say to you, as I should have wished to say, how honoured I felt at what you wrote to me."

This very rapidly, almost breathlessly. And she let her hand barely touch his. But a great hope and joy shot up into the man's eyes as she spoke. He read her face eagerly. The burning blush that overspread it called up a faint, unwonted tinge to his.

"I must go," Edith said. "Perhaps I have done wrong in speaking to you. But I was so afraid you would think me ungrateful."

"Thank you. I understand. You are very good," was all he said.

Edith passed on in a tumult of feeling. She paid her visit and dispensed her aunt's charity hardly knowing what she was about. And she returned home with a guilty sensation of having in some way transgressed the law. But when she told Isabel about it, Isabel approved of what she had done.

To tell the truth, Isabel was undergoing an experience of a similar character herself; and "a fellow-feeling" makes us wondrous kind. She wanted Edith to be as happy as she was. Not as happy—that could not well be, since there was but one Robert—but still, after the same kind.

One day this same Robert came home to dinner wearing a very grave face. He was absent-minded—if his adoring aunt and cousins had been capable of applying the term to him, cross. After dinner he and Aunt Betsy were closeted for a long time together. After leaving her, he looked up the girls.

"One of you had better go to Aunt Betsy," he said. "She is sick. I am going for the doctor. She has heard bad news. Don't be frightened; perhaps I had better tell you what has happened. We have lost our fortune. A great bank has failed, and we small people are pulled down in the wreck. Aunt Betsy takes it very hard. Edith, you had better go to her. You are more composed than Isabel."

Edith hurried away. But she dropped her handkerchief and came back for it—so unexpectedly witnessed a little scene. Robert had taken both Isabel's hands, who was tearfully looking up into his face.

"This is a sad day for me to have told you my love, darling," he was saying. "But your sympathy is so sweet, I could not help myself. Will you wait for me? You may have to wait until we are both old and grey, and I have one foot in the grave. I am not a very young man."

Edith stole away noiselessly. Aunt Betsy was lying prone on the lounge in the sitting-room. She had had a severe shock, but after a while accepted the situation philosophically. Their beautiful old house was sold, and they rented a tiny house in a close, dark street, and there Miss Betsy settled herself with a fortitude that was heroic.

Robert owned lands in the Fen country which it was calculated would in time become valuable. But there was no doubt it would be infinitely to his advantage to be on the spot. Sunset was growing rapidly, and would soon include a number of hitherto unprofitable lots. Besides, there was said to be a fine opening for a lawyer in Sunset. Robert could still carry on the practice of his profession there, which he had hitherto pursued in an indifferent way. He decided to go.

But he did not go alone. He took Isabel with him. But not before both the girls had earnestly entreated that they might be allowed to go to work for themselves. But Robert succeeded in persuading Isabel that he needed her, and it was quite manifest that Miss Betsy needed Edith.

From the very first night of her arrival, indeed, when the old lady had availed herself of the young girl's strong young arm, Edith had established a claim upon her aunt's necessity. No one else could do for her as Edith did.

This is a life of changes. For this very reason we adapt ourselves to circumstances, I suppose. After the first shock nothing surprises us very much. It is as though the thing that is always had been.

After a month or so went, it seemed to Edith that she and Miss Betsy had always kept house together in a tiny box in Green Street, with a maid-of-all-work, and that Isabel and Robert had been married for centuries and living in the Fens.

At first Robert and Isabel wrote home very encouraging letters. Sunset was really all that it had been represented to be. The lots that Robert owned were in an advantageous situation, and would undoubtedly sell well in a year or so. There was no immediate sale for them, however.

Meanwhile, Robert had a reasonably good practice. He made enough to live on, and was gradually paying back the money he had taken for travelling expenses out of his infinitesimally small capital. As for Isabel, she wrote in glowing spirits. Life was full of hope; she was desperately in love. What was poverty, under

these circumstances? It is never the most serious evil to a young person.

But their troubles were not over yet. Six months after Robert and Isabel had gone to Sunset to live Robert was taken ill with the ague common to the locality, and which culminated in a long, lingering fever. He was obliged to give up work. Month after month dragged by, and he was still unable to go back to his office.

Meanwhile, what with doctors' bills, apothecaries' bills, and the daily food they must have, they were making rapid work of the little hoard already alluded to. Finally it was all gone. Isabel wrote a letter, blistered with her tears, to Edith, asking her to send her a small sum, which Robert hoped to be able to repay soon.

This Edith did with a heavy heart. Miss Betsy was as poor as poor could be. In order to assist Isabel they must make a personal sacrifice of some kind. They talked it over and Edith decided that they could dismiss their servant for the present, and call in the services, occasionally, of a charwoman.

"Aunt Betsy," she said, suddenly, "I believe that I could make more if I could get some sewing to do than we could save by dismissing Ann. Are you willing I should try?"

Miss Betsy was willing. She rarely disputed Edith's judgment. Besides, this was merely a choice of drudging. So Edith started off to ask for sewing. She succeeded in finding as much work as she could accomplish at a large shirt factory. She sewed steadily for weeks at "band and gusset and seam."

Miss Betsy persisted in helping, and often the two women sat up into the small hours of the night. They managed in this way to send Robert the money which kept him alive all through that dreary winter.

One afternoon when Edith was hurrying to the factory with a bundle of work, she suddenly came upon Mr. Kuhn, face to face.

"Miss Fortescue!" he exclaimed, hardly believing it possible this pale, careworn girl was the blooming creature of a year ago.

He turned and walked with her to her destination. He had heard of their troubles, but he had not dreamed how bad things were. And poor Edith had not heard a friend's voice for months; she was burdened with care and anxiety. It was impossible to question the sincerity of his sorrow. At the door he hesitated.

"May I come to see you?" he urged.

Edith locked her hands in mute distress.

"I am afraid not." Then she added, "Aunt Betsy does not like strangers. Please don't be angry."

"How could I?" he said, with a sad half-smile, and so left her. Left her with such a heavy heart.

But poor Miss Betsy would never offer any violent opposition to anyone again. That very night she was stricken down with paralysis. After that, for days, Edith lived on as in a tomb. One day Mr. Kuhn presented himself. He had just heard of Miss Betsy's attack incidentally, and he had hurried to Edith to entreat her to command his services.

It was the first time in the course of their strange love-making that they had had an interview worthy of the name. And James Kuhn took advantage of this fact to plead his cause with an earnestness that was all the intenser because it had been so long suppressed. Edith listened to his avowals of love; she yielded inch by inch.

She falteringly told him that she cared for him—or that she thought she could; but she would enter into no engagement until Aunt Betsy's consent had been gained, and under present circumstances it might endanger her life even to allude to the subject.

But that very night an opportunity came to broach the subject, as Edith sat by the old lady's bedside. Miss Betsy made a struggling effort to articulate, and for the first time in days she succeeded in putting a few words together. These were words of anxiety for Edith. She was dying. She was leaving Edith alone. If Edith only had a protector.

"I've never had but the one lover, dear auntie," Edith said.

"I would give you to James Kuhn, even now," Miss Betsy said, feebly.

Then Edith contrived to tell her how James Kuhn still wanted her. In the end, Miss Betsy was more than reconciled to the match. James Kuhn won his way to her heart. He was tireless in his generosity and thoughtfulness.

When she was driven to the bride's house on Edith's wedding-day, such a beautiful surprise awaited her. The carriage stopped before her own old home. Edith helped her out, guided her up the familiar stairs, into the bright, sunny sitting-room, where so many happy hours had been passed.

It had been a sentimental delight to Mr. Kuhn to purchase the old homestead when it had passed out of the Mays' hands, although at that time he had not dared to dream that he should ever bring Edith back here as mistress. And here Miss Betsy ended her days.

Robert recovered in due course of time, and is now a prosperous man, and Miss Betsy often visits him and Isabel in Sunset; but she is happiest with Edith. She is fond of saying:

"Edith, I used to tell you I would not consent to your marrying James Kuhn if he were worth his weight in gold. But I did not know what kind of gold he was made of."

M. L.

FACETIE.

WHAT IT HAS COME TO.

ITATE GENTLEMAN: "Porter."

PORTER: "Yes, sir."

ITATE GENTLEMAN: "This is a smoking carriage, isn't it?"

PORTER: "Yes, sir, certainly."

ITATE GENTLEMAN: "But there are ladies in it."

PORTER: "There generally are, sir."

ITATE GENTLEMAN: "But—but what am I to do?"

PORTER: "Ask them if they object to you, sir, I suppose."

(Whistle. Train starts.)

—Judy.

TOO BAD.

LIBERAL LIBERAL AGENT (who has been holding the animal whilst the coster went in to vote—for the wrong side, too, as it turned out): "What the deuce do you mean by voting for the Conservative while your donkey is wearing our colour?"

COSTER: "Oh, him! he's on'y a lass, I'm a Conservative."

—Judy.

"A SECT LIKELY TO ENDURE, THOUGH."

LADY VISITOR: "Now, boys, that I have explained these things, perhaps one of you can tell me which sect is most intolerant and in the greatest darkness."

MASTER STUBBINS: "Please, miss, I know—insects."

—Fun.

FORGIVE AND FAGOT.

Of course Mr. Gladstone won! It was not to be supposed that so accomplished a woodman would be unable to deal with a few fagots.

—Fun.

TRADE JOTTINGS.

The painter and glazier.

The painter and glazier may always be identified by asking him how he is, as he invariably replies, "Putty well, I thank you."

Our own P. and G. informs us that a striking anomaly in the trade is this: Skylights are frequently constructed of ground glass.

The glazier does not seem to flourish now as much as he did some centuries ago. No doubt his most happy time was the glass-ial epoch.

When a painter paints a house over three times when twice would have been sufficient, the house is said to have received two coats and a waste coat.

Painters use a great deal of umber in painting

anything likely to be exposed to the weather, but our own P. and G. says that the best umber to stand rain is umber-ella.

Painters and glaziers suffer from a "painful affliction called painter's 'colic' which, as it usually lasts about twenty-four hours at a time, is known in the trade as 'the Colic for the day.'"

The common expression "oil colours," is quite erroneous, as it is well known that oil colours nothing—unless there is some paint mixed with it.

Painters are proverbial for their laziness; and it has been truly observed that ships' painters have never yet been known to do a single stroke of work for anybody.

—Funny Folks.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LEMON SAUCE.—Beat to a froth one tablespoonful of butter, one cup of sugar, one tablespoonful of corn starch, and two eggs. When very smooth and light add one cup of boiling water. Set the basin into boiling water and stir five minutes. Season with half a teaspoonful of lemon, and serve.

DOUGH AND DRIPPING CAKES.—These are called flaky cakes, and are much eaten in the Peak of Derbyshire, hot, for tea. Take one pound light dough, roll it out half an inch thick, spread on it a good layer of beef dripping, repeat this two or three times in the same way that puff paste is made, cut the cakes into squares, and bake in a brick oven. They are very nice, and require no butter.

TO CLEAN JEWELLERY.—Wash in soapsuds; rinse in diluted alcohol, and lay in a bowl of dry sawdust to dry. As simple as this seems, it is the nicest way possible to clean gold chains or ornaments of any kind.

DAMP CLOSETS.—For a damp closet or cupboard, which is liable to cause mildew, place in it a saucer full of quicklime, and it will not only absorb all apparent dampness, but sweeten and disinfect the place. Renew the lime once a fortnight, or as often as it becomes slaked.

MISCELLANEOUS.

The riding establishment of the Royal Artillery at Woolwich, according to the army estimates, costs about £10,000 a year.

The electric light is now used at the Crystal Palace. The effect is charming, and it is generally admitted to be a great success.

Just before the ex-Empress Eugénie sailed from England for Zululand she sent her Imperial crown, which had been saved from the general spoliation after Sedan, to the church of Notre Dame des Victories, and a grand religious ceremony has been held in recognition of the Imperial gift.

The model of the sphinxes to be erected at the base of Cleopatra's Needle on the Thames Embankment has been completed; it is 18 ft. in length. Two casts will be taken from it, and placed one on each side of the obelisk, as if guarding the needle, similarly to the position occupied by the Landseer lions round the column of Nelson in Trafalgar-square. On the sides of the pedestal of the obelisk there will be inscribed tablets of bronze, which will give the particulars and history of the needle.

When the great officers of State went to announce to Princess Victoria that she had inherited the Crown she received them en deshabille. The incident is plentifully on record; one of the Royal Academicians has painted it. It is to be exhibited this year.

The building trade is suffering severely from the competition which has been entered into with us by foreign countries, the greatest effects being felt from the Japanese bricks, and the German and Belgian ready-made sashes, moulding, doors, &c., with which, at low prices, the market is now glutted.

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

OPTIC.—The best places to go to for treatment of ophthalmia is to Moorfields, before 10 a.m.; or to Calthorpe Street, Grays Inn Road, before 1 p.m.

WILLIAM W.—The year 1900 will not be a leap year; 1904 will be. For further information see our reply to "Camden," in No. 587.

AN UNHAPPY MOTHER.—We think by searching the London Directory you will find what you require.

WEARY HENRIETTA.—1. Early rising, healthy food, and outdoor exercise. Wash the face with the best yellow or tar soap, and in oatmeal and water occasionally. 2. Colour of hair, dark brown.

C. A. F.—You are labouring under some curious error. "Tepid" water is not sold; the word means warm.

E. A. L.—1. It is legal. The best course would be to marry first by the Jewish rites, then by the Christian. 2. We could give you several specifics, but they would do as much harm one way as good the other. Try washing in a little soda and water occasionally.

BILL.—We do not think there is any certain method of removing Indian ink marks from the skin.

ANGELINA.—It would not be proper for the lady to do so under all circumstances; but 'tis noble to forgive, and proof of a good disposition.

VIOLA.—1. No. 2. To the parish in which he has lived and paid rates.

ROSEMOND.—The young man undoubtedly owes you an apology, but all other benevolent persons in trying to get the "outlying masses" to attend church have to endure frequent disappointments. You must count upon your share of them in your experience. Do all you can to bring him under good influences, consistently, of course, with your own self-respect as a young lady.

S. W. P.—There is no evidence to show that the young lady purposely slighted you, whereas you confess that you contrived a plan for slighting her for the purpose of avenging what you considered her improper treatment of you. Her conduct certainly required explanation, and no doubt she could have given it satisfactorily had you afforded her the opportunity. But your conduct was premeditatedly insulting, and she has just cause for refusing to converse with you.

HETTIE.—There are times when it is civil to say to a gentleman, "We shall be happy to see you." A certain sense of propriety must guide a lady as to the choice of them. In this instance we think you need not take trouble. If your friend has the usual courage of young men he will, ere long, ask permission to call at your house; and that, perhaps, would be more satisfactory to all parties in the end than your invitation would be.

A. H.—Grease your pistol with kerosene oil until the rust is removed and then use olive oil. Kerosene is the best to remove rust, but olive or sweet oil is better for preventing rust.

LILLIAN.—You should simply behave towards him in a ladylike and cordial manner. A lady has an instinctive tact and delicacy in such matters which are more effective than the wisdom of men.

MARGARET.—Your case, as you state it, is an afflicting one. Have you no friends, who have known you from childhood, to whom you can turn for advice? Strangers cannot help a person situated as you describe yourself to be. Some motherly lady who knew your mother, and would take an interest in you for your mother's sake, would be the best kind of adviser who could help you most.

DANIEL N.—As you are on such good terms with the young lady's mother it would be a good plan to talk the matter over with her. She could do more to make "the course of true love run smooth" than anybody else, except the young lady herself, and you say you are sure of her sympathy.

NUBIAN.—The term creole was originally applied to any person born of European parents in America or the West Indies, and it is still so used by some writers. But the more general and usual sense in which the name is now used is to designate any person who is born within or near the tropics.

ALICE and SARAH, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. Alice is twenty-five, blue eyes, tall, fair, loving. Sarah is twenty-four, medium height, brown hair, hazel eyes, fond of home and children.

L. S. G. and E. L. G., brother and sister, wish to correspond with a lady and gentleman with a view to matrimony. L. S. G. is twenty, fair, and fond of home. E. L. G. is seventeen, dark, fond of music. Respondents must be eighteen and twenty.

I. C. and ROSE would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. I. C. is nineteen, of a loving disposition, fair, domesticated. Rose is twenty, fair, fond of music and dancing.

HELEN and EDITHA, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. Helen is eighteen, fair, good-looking, tall. Editha is seventeen, medium height, fond of music. Respondents must be tall, dark, good-looking, fond of children.

SUE and CARRIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen between twenty-five and thirty with a view to matrimony. Sue is nineteen, golden hair, dark eyes, fond of home. Carrie is eighteen, brown hair, dark eyes, tall, domesticated, good-looking, and good-tempered.

WALTER HARRY, twenty-two, tall, dark, of a loving disposition, fond of children, would like to correspond with a tall young lady.

DAISY, a French lady, would like to correspond with an English gentleman about forty-five in a good position.

"IF YOU SHOULD EVER GET MARRIED."

If you should ever get married, John,
I'll tell you what to do;
Go get a little tenement,
Just big enough for two,
And one spare room for company,
And one spare bed within it,
And if you'd begin love's life aright
You'd better thus begin it.

In furniture be moderate, John,
And let the stuffed chairs wait;
One looking-glass will do for both
Yourself and loving mate,
And Brussels, too, and other things,
Which make a fine appearance,
If you can better afford it
Will look better a year hence.

Some think they must have pictures, John,
Superb and costly, too;
Your wife will be a picture, John,
Let that suffice for you.
Remember how the wise man said
A tent and love within it
Is better than a splendid house
With bickerings every minute.

And one word as to cooking, John;
Your wife can do the best,
For love to make the biscuit rise
Is better far than yeast.
No matter if each day you don't
Bring turkey to your table,
'Twill better relish by-and-by
When you are better able.

For all you buy pay money, John,
Money that every day;
If you would have your life run smooth
There is no better way.
A note to pay is an ugly thing,
If thing you choose to call it,
When it hangs o'er a man who has
No money in his wallet.

And now when you are married, John,
Don't try to ape the rich;
It took them many a toilsome year
To gain their envied niche.
And if you would gain the summit, John,
Look well to your beginning,
And then will all you wish repay
The toil and care of winning.

W.

JULIET, eighteen, brown hair, grey eyes, would like to correspond with a young gentleman of a loving disposition.

IRENE, MACKAY, and GINEVRA, three friends, would like to correspond with three young men. Irene is eighteen, tall, dark, fond of music. Mackay is eighteen, fond of dancing, dark. Ginevra is nineteen, medium height, fond of music. Respondents must be of a loving disposition, tall.

DOLLY and ALICE, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen. Dolly is twenty-three, dark, fond of home and children. Alice is eighteen, fond of music and dancing.

NANCY and MAY, two friends, wish to correspond with two gentlemen. Nancy is twenty-two, dark hair, blue eyes, fond of home and children. May is twenty-three, fair, of a loving disposition, medium height, thoroughly domesticated, and fond of home. Respondents must be about twenty-four, fair, loving.

ETHEL, BESSIE, and EDITH, three friends, would like to correspond with three young men. Ethel is tall, and of a loving disposition. Bessie is dark, blue eyes, fond of music. Edith is twenty, fair.

LILLIE and ETHEL, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen about nineteen. Lillie is seventeen, medium height, dark hair, blue eyes, good-looking. Lillie is sixteen, light hair, blue eyes, loving, good-looking.

PEARL, fair, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a good-looking gentleman with a view to matrimony.

SARAH ANN, thirty-six, dark, would like to correspond with a mechanic about the same age. Must reside in Birmingham.

ROSEY, KATE, and NELLIE, three friends, would like to correspond with three gentlemen. Rosey is eighteen, dark, blue eyes, medium height. Kate is seventeen, medium height, fair, good-looking. Nellie is tall, dark, good-looking, dark eyes.

S. G. and A. C., two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. S. G. is twenty-one, tall, dark. A. C. is twenty-two, medium height.

ALFRED D., fair, medium height, of a loving disposition, would like to correspond with a young lady about twenty.

AMY and BERTIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen. Amy is nineteen, good-looking, dark hair and eyes, fond of home and children. Bertie is seventeen, light hair, dark eyes, good-looking, loving, fond of music and dancing.

RICHARD L., nineteen, would like to correspond with a young lady about the same age, fair, light hair, medium height, fond of home.

ETHEL and POLLY, two friends, wish to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Ethel is twenty-two, fair, light brown hair, dark blue eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home. Polly is twenty-three, dark, black hair, blue eyes, tall, fond of home and music.

D. M. and G. L., two friends, wish to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. D. M. is twenty-four, fond of dancing, dark. G. L. is twenty-one, fond of home.

LOUIE and ANNIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Louie is twenty-two, dark, fond of dancing. Annie is twenty, good-tempered, fair, and fond of music and dancing.

FRANCES S., twenty, medium height, hazel eyes, loving, fond of home, would like to correspond with a gentleman about twenty-one, of a loving disposition, dark, tall, fond of music, good-looking.

HARRY J. and WILLIAM C., two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. Harry J. is twenty-four, dark, blue eyes, medium height, of a loving disposition, fond of dancing. William C. is twenty-two, curly hair, blue eyes, loving, fond of music and dancing. Respondents must be between eighteen and twenty-three, good-looking, fair, and fond of home and children.

BOWLINE and KNOTSPICE, two seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. Bowline is twenty, light hair, blue eyes, fair, fond of children. Knotspice is twenty-two, fair, light hair, of a loving disposition, and fond of children.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

ELOISE is responded to by—J. J., twenty, dark, good-looking.

MOLICULE by—Lizzie, twenty, medium height, loving, light hair, fair.

ATOM by—Elorence, nineteen, dark hair and eyes, fond of home and music.

HARRY by—Primrose, seventeen, medium height, and thoroughly domesticated.

FEET OF THE MESSES by—Isabel, nineteen, fond of home, of a loving disposition.

F. F. by—Loving Harriet.

G. B. by—Flo, nineteen, dark, medium height, fond of home and children.

C. E. B. by—Daisy, eighteen, fair, tall, fond of music.

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